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Sixty-ninth year

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Tuesday, 29 April 2014, 10.20 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Ogwu/Mr. Sarki	(Nigeria)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Barros
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Araud
	Jordan	Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein
	Lithuania	Mrs. Kazragienė
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Oh Joon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Manzi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Egypt, Guatemala, Guinea, Iceland, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Namibia, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; and His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Fathalla, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: I intend to dedicate today's briefing to the Middle East peace process as the Security Council will be briefed on Syria tomorrow and on Lebanon next week.

We meet today, nine months to date since the launch of United States-brokered negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians with the previously agreed objective of achieving a comprehensive settlement on all core issues by this time. In those nine months, we have seen an unprecedented effort by Secretary of State Kerry, assisted by Mr. Martin Indyk as his envoy, to see the process through at long last. Quartet, regional and international stakeholders, recognizing it as perhaps one of the last chances to achieve a two-State solution, have also been actively engaged in support of the effort.

Yet efforts have faltered, given the inability of the parties to bridge the gaps on their substantive positions or even accept with reservations a United States framework that would attempt to do just that. As of today, we know talks have been suspended. It behooves the parties and all stakeholders to recognize that this is another moment of truth. Inaction could see the situation turn into a crisis. That is why joint reflection is in order on how the current impasse came about and ways to overcome it.

On 28 March, the Israeli Cabinet postponed its decision to follow through with the release of the fourth and last tranche of 30 pre-Oslo prisoners. On 1 April, interpreting that as a breach of the quiet understanding of a diplomatic truce in return for the release of 104 pre-Oslo prisoners, the Palestinians, by a unanimous vote of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), proceeded with submitting accession instruments to 15 international treaties and conventions. The announcements of 708 reissued tenders for settlement units in Giio on the same day added to the Palestinian conviction that they had no other choice. Nevertheless, President Abbas reiterated his commitment to negotiations.

The Palestinian decision was met with surprise by the Israeli side, which has since indicated its understanding that they were nearing a deal to extend negotiations that comprised more than the aforementioned prisoners. In their interpretation, the original understanding was valid as long as there was progress within the talks.

Despite those events, the negotiators continued to meet in an effort to find a way out of the impasse. We understand that among the issues discussed as part of Palestinian demands have been the release of the fourth tranche of prisoners and a freeze of settlement construction, combined with an offer of continued talks if the issue of borders is front-loaded. The international community also remained active, urging both parties to remain constructively engaged in talks and not miss the opening presented by the United States. The Secretary-

General was in contact with both leaders on 13 and 14 April, and High Representative Ashton issued a statement to that effect on 18 April. In an emergency meeting on 9 April, Arab Foreign Ministers remained appreciative of United States efforts and declared their support for President Abbas, including by renewed pledges of a safety net in the event of a loss of revenue as a result of Israeli potential reprisals. Such support is timely and welcome, while we urge Israel to adhere to the punctual and transparent transfer of revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, which is essential for the stability of the Authority.

In subsequent developments, Palestinians reached a unity agreement on 23 April, stipulating, inter alia, that a national consensus Government would be formed within five weeks and elections held no later than six months after the formation of that Government. Following the announcement of that accord, Israel cancelled a meeting scheduled between the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators and, after an emergency Cabinet meeting on 24 April, took the decision to suspend the talks. Quartet envoys remained in frequent contact throughout, holding several telephone calls to discuss the developments.

The political stalemate that I have been describing poses great risks to the prospect of a two-State solution, which I will elaborate on later. It will also not be without impact on the situation on the ground, which I will briefly address, as it is already volatile, with negative trends in the West Bank and a fragile calm in Gaza. The year 2013 saw the highest number of Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank since 2009. I was appalled by incidents of violence in the reporting period, against both Palestinians and Israelis, which we condemn. Two particularly disturbing instances were the killing of an Israeli man and the injury of two others, including a child, in an attack near Hebron on 14 April, during Passover, and the shooting by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) of a 14-year-old Palestinian boy crossing the Barrier on 19 March, which resulted in his death.

The rise in violence in the West Bank was reflected by the following trends, inter alia: increased clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians, particularly in and around refugee camps; Palestinian stone- and Molotov cocktail-throwing, resulting in some injuries and material damage; and settler attacks against Palestinians and their property, in spite of some Israeli efforts to crack down on so-called price tag attacks, which have also targeted Israeli security forces. We should be under no illusion that the level of violence would be higher still were it not for the work of the Palestinian security forces to maintain law and order, and continued security coordination.

Settlement activity continued. In two worrisome developments on 13 April, the Government of Israel retroactively approved legalizing a West Bank outpost at Gush Etzion, appropriating private Palestinian land, and granted settler access to a disputed Hebron building that Palestinians have over the years argued in court was purchased illegally. The United Nations position on the illegality of settlements is well known. The reporting period saw 88 demolitions of Palestinian structures, including five residences and a mosque today, and the dismantling of five settlement outposts by the IDF.

The situation in East Jerusalem remains worrisome. Tensions and clashes in the Old City have continued, including during the holiday period. The Secretary-General has reiterated the importance of respect for the religious freedom of all, for worshippers of all faiths to have access to their holy sites and for all sides to refrain from provocations. He has restated the United Nations long-standing position that the status of the Old City and the religious sites within is an extremely sensitive final-status issue that can be resolved only through negotiations, and that the parties should refrain from attempts to establish facts on the ground and alter the character of the Old City.

All of that points to the fact that the situation on the ground is serious and likely to further deteriorate if not addressed. We must not forget Gaza, where practical steps are urgently needed to improve the humanitarian security situation. In Gaza, too, there are troubling signs, with more rockets fired at Israel, border incidents and Israeli operations, which have also caused death or injury to civilians in recent months. Ongoing political and security developments in Egypt have also led to the continued closure of tunnels, the tackling illegal smuggling and the frequent closure of Rafah.

The United Nations remains actively engaged, together with the Palestinian Authority and donors, in addressing some of the most pressing issues in Gaza, including by ensuring that a safety net is in place to allow the most critical water, sanitation and health-related facilities to continue operating. In that regard, I am pleased to report that the Government of Turkey recently pledged $1.5 million to the World Health Organization to address the shortages in a

number of key drugs, which we hope will help decrease expensive referrals of patients outside Gaza. We are still waiting for Israel to deliver on its commitment to the full resumption of the previously agreed package of United Nations construction works, where some $26 million worth of projects are still stalled and another $120 million worth of new work is pending Israeli approval.

Political progress is crucial to address Gaza's structural problems. In that context, I had an opportunity on 24 April to discuss with President Abbas the very important development towards Palestinian unity. I was assured by the President that the agreement would be implemented under his leadership and on the basis of the PLO commitments. President Abbas emphasized that those commitments would hold the future Government of national consensus to recognition of Israel, non-violence and adherence to previous agreements. President Abbas also reiterated his continued commitment to peace negotiations and to keeping protests non-violent, a message he also delivered to the PLO Central Council on 26 April.

On the basis of those commitments, the Secretary-General is of the view that this development can constitute an opening that offers at long last the prospect of reuniting the West Bank and Gaza under one legitimate Palestinian Authority, including by holding long overdue elections. For this to have a chance of success, it needs to be managed the right way. The Secretary-General calls on all parties to cooperate to that end. We now expect all factions to support that process as described by President Abbas, meaning that they must commit in deeds, not only words, to that path — first and foremost by adhering to non-violence in the West Bank and in Gaza.

We are also aware that Israel, facing a continued rocket threat from Gaza, has reacted with acute skepticism to this development, as manifested in its decision to suspend talks and threats of reprisals.

We urge all parties to refrain from measures that could turn a delicate situation into a full-blown crisis. We will be following developments closely in the period ahead, and continue to believe that if unity is implemented on the terms described by President Abbas, it is not contradictory with continued peaceful negotiations, as the President himself has reiterated. As such, it should be viewed as an opportunity, not a threat.

Difficult choices are now required of the parties. They should realize that not making a choice is the most detrimental choice of all, namely, to accept that we are going down the path of a one-State reality on the ground. This is a time for the parties to reflect on whether they wish to live up to their stated commitment to the two-State solution, or whether they will by default let it slip further away.

First and foremost, they must refrain from steps that will render futile any efforts to find a way back to negotiations and salvage the two-State solution. Both sides have to convince each other anew that they are partners for peace. If Israel is serious about a two-State solution, it must recognize the negative impact of continued illegal settlement activity. Palestinians in turn should be reflective of their actions in international forums. The international community and the region should also reassess its role, if we remain convinced — as I do — of the importance of the two-State solution, and ask what we can do to persuade the parties to make the right choice.

It is important to avoid escalation, diplomatically and on the ground. Yet it is equally important that we work in concert to define a long-overdue political horizon on the basis of principles already laid out, less the Oslo paradigm is put in real jeopardy. This can no longer be business as usual. Unrealistic and prescriptive timelines may be counter-productive, as can rushing the parties back to the table without having the necessary framework in place. I believe we must use the current moment of reflection for a discussion on a substantive basis for an early resumption of talks, while building on the United States effort of the past nine months and relying on continued United States engagement.

The Secretary-General firmly believes there is still a window for us, the international community and parties, to act if we wish to realize the vision of two States for two peoples, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition of each other's legitimate rights and those of their respective citizens, including self-determination. The United Nations remains as fundamentally committed as ever in helping parties bring this conflict to an end with an end to the occupation that began in 1967, an end to the conflict and an end of claims, in pursuit of lasting peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

The President: I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, Madam President, I congratulate Nigeria on its presidency of the Security Council under your wise and able leadership. We also express appreciation for Luxembourg's skilled leadership of the Council in March. I also thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing to the Council this morning.

Since the Security Council's last debate on this issue (see S/PV.7096), there have been many developments on the ground and in the political process. In official letters, we have alerted the Council to the rising tensions and the deterioration of the situation due to Israel's persistent violations and intransigence in negotiations. We appealed to the Council and the international community to uphold their responsibilities, stressing the criticality of the hour to salvage the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and the long-standing parameters enshrined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

We have always recognized the necessity of international support and engagement by all parties concerned, including the active mediation role of the United States, the role of the League of Arab States and the efforts of the Quartet members and the international community as a whole. Moreover, despite the Security Council's paralysis, we have never ceased appealing for collective action to uphold the law, while underscoring the urgency of confronting Israel's widespread violations and threats to the physical viability of the two-State solution. Despite all the difficulties, the Palestinian leadership has remained committed to negotiations and acted in consummate good faith.

Regrettably, all of that has been to no avail. The convergence of Israel's bad faith in the negotiations, including reneging on the prisoner release agreement and its unlawful actions on the ground, particularly its intensification of settlement activities and incessant aggression in occupied East Jerusalem, seriously undermined the peace process — now totally suspended — due to Israel's unilateral decision to halt negotiations.

The evolution of the situation has prompted the Palestinian leadership to undertake actions deemed necessary to assert and protect the rights of the State of Palestine and the Palestinian people under international law. All actions have been politically legitimate, non-violent and aimed at realizing the inalienable human rights of our people. In that regard, on 1 April, President Mahmoud Abbas signed 15 instruments of accession to multilateral treaties, affirming the State of Palestine's acceptance of the principles therein, its readiness to uphold legal obligations and its commitment to promoting the right of the Palestinian people in accordance with the law. Among those are the core treaties of international humanitarian law and the core human rights treaties. We thank the Secretary-General, Switzerland and the Netherlands, in their respective capacities as depositariaes, for their serious, efficient administration of that matter.

That important step was followed by the advancement of long-overdue Palestinian reconciliation with the agreement of 23 April. That matter is widely recognized as critical for the unity of our people and political system and for the fulfillment of our national aspirations. Moreover, reconciliation and elections are central to the advancement of the democratic, pluralistic and inclusive society we desire to foster. We are grateful for the support of our Arab brethren, including Egypt's sponsorship of the Palestinian national dialogue, as well as the efforts of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Moreover, we are grateful for the support expressed in that regard by the United Nations, the majority of Quartet members and friendly States and organizations from around the world.

We reject the occupying Power's vulgar interference in this intetnal Palestinian issue, cynically done both during the time of division and now as we move towards unity. We reject its baseless excuses to suspend negotiations and take punitive measures as a result, and call on the international community to hold Israel responsible for obstruction of the peace process. In that regard, we have made clear the fact that the new Palestinian Government will adhere to the PLO political programme and to commitments and agreements made. Moreover, we reaffirm that reconciliation and negotiations are not mutually exclusive, but necessary steps aimed at achieving a just peace based on international law.

Following the strides made towards reconciliation, a meeting of the PLO Central Council was convened on 26 and 27 April in Ramallah under the leadership of President Abbas, with serious discussions on the way

forward. I had the privilege of attending that meeting. The Central Council comprehensively addressed all issues of national priority, including, inter alia, continuing the efforts to advance the State of Palestine's status in the international arena; the vital role of the international community, including the Security Council and the General Assembly, in holding Israel accountable for its violations and in upholding United Nations resolutions for the achievement of peace; the imperative that any resumption of negotiations be based on clear terms of reference, including respect for the pre-1967 borders, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, a halt to all Israeli settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem, and respect for the rights of the Palestine refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III); the imperative of ensuring the release of the fourth group of Palestinian prisoners, according to previous agreements, and the release of the thousands of other Palestinians in Israeli jails; the need to ensure protection of our holy sites; and the imperative of alleviating the suffering of our people in the Gaza Strip and bringing an end to Israel's unlawful blockade.

All of those priorities and goals are being pursued by the Palestinian leadership consistent with the relevant provisions of international law and consistent with the clear commitment made to pursue political, legal, peaceful and non-violent means to realize the inalienable rights of our people and a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Despite that proven Palestinian commitment to peace, Israel has maintained its rejectionist stance and persisted with its grave breaches, constantly reaffirming its role as occupier and oppressor, not as peacemaker. Once again, Israel has thwarted peace efforts and, if left unchecked, it will continue to sabotage negotiations, upend the situation on the ground and bring a definitive end to the two-State solution.

In that regard, despite the clear global consensus on the matter, in recent months Israeli officials brazenly announced plans to build thousands more settlement units in the very same Palestinian territory from which Israel must withdraw if the illegitimate military occupation is ever to truly end. Israel's own Central Bureau of Statistics revealed a 123 per cent rise in settlement building this year relative to 2013. In just the nine months since negotiations resumed, Israel declared plans to construct more than 13,000 settlement units, in addition to the construction under way on thousands of other units, thereby underscoring its expansionist aims, making a mockery of its alleged commitment to the two-State solution and tarnishing the credibility of the peace process. In that regard, as stated by Ms. Hanan Ashrawi, member of the PLO Executive Committee, we must clarify:

> "Building is not just building: it's not something that is so benign. Building is the willful destruction of the two-State solution. It's a constant act of aggression. It's a war crime."

In occupied East Jerusalem, such illegal measures have been taken to extremes, seriously aggravating the situation and inflaming religious sentiment. We condemn all of those illegal measures and the acts of provocation and incitement routinely committed by Israeli extremists, including settlers, Government officials and religious zealots, particularly at Haram Al-Sharif, which aim at unlawfully and forcibly asserting Israeli control, altering the demography, character and identity of that sensitive area and undermining the status of East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.

Moreover, in that regard, we firmly reject any attempts by the occupying Power to temporally or spatially divide the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Such actions threaten to gravely destabilize the situation, with far-reaching consequences, and must he halted. We reiterate the need to ensure freedom of religion and access to the city by all worshippers, and condemn the restrictions imposed by Israel that impeded the worship of Palestinian Christians and other pilgrims during Easter week, as well as the constant restrictions against Palestinian Muslims seeking to pray at the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

We underscore the centrality of East Jerusalem as an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, and reaffirm that its unlawful annexation by Israel, which has never been recognized by the international community, remains null and void. In line with the collective démarche made to the President of the Security Council by Palestine, along with the Chairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and Jordan and Egypt, the international community must demand that Israel, the occupying Power, comply with its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant United Nations resolutions on Jerusalem.

This period also witnessed the continued use of lethal violence by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian civilian population, a population entitled to protection under international law and which the occupying Power is obliged to ensure the well-being of, but instead purposely violates their right to life, targeting Palestinians for death, injury and other forms of harm. More than 60 Palestinians were killed by the occupying forces in the nine-month period of negotiations, most of them in refugee camps. That has included children, among them Wajih Al-Ramahi, 15, Saji Darwish, 18, and Yousef Al-Shawamreh, 15. It has also included violence against women, among them the killing of Amneh Qudeih, age 57, in Gaza.

Here we must refer to the repeated Israeli allegation of throwing stones as a pretext for killing Palestinian youth and other civilian protesters. The murder of Palestinians by Israel, the occupying Power, for expressing their opposition to the brutal, 47-year military occupation and its illegal, inhumane policies and conduct in the Occupied Palestinian Territory violates international humanitarian law and other international norms.

Also over the past months, Israeli settler violence and terrorism has persisted, including attacks on Palestinian school children, farmers and other villagers; the murder of an elderly Palestinian man, Saleh Malihat, who was run over by a settler in a car; and attacks on olive trees and other Palestinian properties by gangs of settlers who continue to act with impunity and with ero accountability for their crimes.

Throughout this period, Israel has also continued its non-stop arrest of Palestinian civilians. More than 4,000 Palestinians have been detained since the negotiations began in July. Human rights violations permeate the entire Israeli prison system, inflicting grave suffering, deplorable conditions and humiliation on the more than 5,000 Palestinians in Israeli captivity, including the 187 children being held in Israeli prisons. Endangering their own lives, Palestinians held under administrative detention also continue to carry out hunger strikes to protest their imprisonment without charge or trial. We again draw attention to their plight and call on Israel to release the fourth group of Palestinian prisoners and to release all Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

Added to all of this is the humanitarian crisis that persists in the Gaza Strip due to Israel's continuing illegal blockade and the gross collective punishment of that area's Palestinian civilian population, along with recurrent violent military attacks. United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, continue to highlight the severity of this crisis, but to no avail. Especially among the Palestine refugee population, which constitutes the majority of Gaza's residents, that unlawful situation is deepening hardships, with massive socioeconomic and humanitarian consequences. We again call for an end to the Israeli blockade and for the sustained, regular opening of Gaza's border crossings in line with the relevant resolutions.

Time and again, we have come before the Security Council and called for action to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to respect its legal obligations, including under the Council's own resolutions. At this critical time, the long-standing international consensus on the parameters of the solution, enshrined in United Nations resolutions, must be reaffirmed, not set aside. They include a complete end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967; the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security based on the pre-1967 borders; and a just solution for Palestine refugees based on resolution 194 (III).

Time and again, we have called on Israel to genuinely commit to the path of peace, only to face repeated frustration and disappointment. Despite the burdens of occupation and 66 years of Al-Nakba, we have done our part to uphold international law and to act in good faith in the context of all initiatives and negotiations aimed at resolving this tragic conflict. Regrettably, up until the present moment that has all been to no avail and our people continue to suffer gravely from the occupation, oppression and dispossession so unjustly inflicted on them.

Yet we have not given up on peace. We call on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities at this crucial juncture to make it a reality. Israel, the occupying Power, must be required to comply with the law and must be held accountable should it persist with its blatant violations. The time is past due for Israel to be held to the same rules that all States are obliged to respect, without exception. That requires, inter alia, a clear rejection by the international community of Israel's cynical excuses and pretexts aimed at entrenching the occupation and evading peace under the cover of negotiations. Lip service to peace should

never be accepted as a substitute for genuine steps for peace.

We are all too aware that the status quo is unsustainable, as we heard from Robert Serry, and that peace negotiations can never succeed under such conditions. The State of Palestine is ready to uphold its obligations and commitments to make peace a reality. However, a real partner for peace is missing. Israel, the occupying Power, must change its behaviour on the ground and in the negotiations and truly commit to the path of peace. Here, the role of the international community, including the Security Council, is vital; it must act collectively to demand and ensure Israel's respect for its legal obligations and to foster the appropriate conditions for credible negotiations to achieve Palestinian-Israeli peace.

The Palestinian people will never forgo their inalienable rights, and the Palestinian leadership will continue to take all necessary political, legal and peaceful measures for the fulfilment of those rights and the achievement of justice, freedom and peace for our people. We once again appeal for the international community's support in that noble endeavour.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): First of all, allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate Nigeria on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

Next week, Israel will celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut, its Independence Day, which commemorates the Jewish people's return to the land of Israel after thousands of years in exile. In the land of Israel, every hill and valley, every stream and ravine is steeped in history. In Hebron, one can visit the spot where Abraham purchased a burial plot for his wife, Sarah. In Jerusalem, one can visit the place where King David established his kingdom and where King Solomon built the Jewish temple.

For thousands of years, the Jewish people maintained a constant presence in the land of Israel, watching empires rise and fall and conquerors come and go, until 1948 when the modern State of Israel was reborn. Since then, we have taken a desolate land and made it flourish; we took a language on the verge of extinction and brought it back to life; and we took an ancient people and gave them refuge from the persecutions that plagued them across the centuries and across the globe.

The State of Israel is proof that the strength of a nation can be measured by the freedom of its citizens. From the Red Sea to the Caspian Sea, Israel is the only democracy providing its citizens the right to worship freely, the right to vote in elections, and the right to read from an uncensored media. It is also the only nation that defends the rule of law and upholds rights of minorities. Israel does not preach these rights; we practice them. Where else in the Middle East can a member of a minority group serve as a Supreme Court justice? In Israel, Salim Joubran, a Christian Arab Israeli, has done so for more than a decade. I am proud to represent an ancient people in its modern homeland, a people whose numbers are few but whose contributions are immeasurable. A people who confront terror and pray for peace.

When I think about negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, there is a predictable pattern on the part of the Palestinians — demand, delay and desert. Before taking a single step towards the negotiation table, the Palestinian leadership demands that Israel submit to substantial concessions. Once Israel agrees, they drag their feet and evoke every delay tactic in the book. Then, as the deadline approaches and courageous leadership decisions are required, Abbas deserts the talks. He did so in 2008. After the Israeli Prime Minister had offered an unprecedented and far-reaching peace deal, the Palestinians simply walked away. He did it again in 2009. Prime Minister Netanyahu courageously extended an olive branch to the Palestinians in his historic Bar-Ilan speech, agreeing to a 10-month settlement freeze. The Palestinians stalled and did not reciprocate. In February 2012 — surprise, surprise — just as we were on the verge of a breakthrough, Abbas abandoned the talks and flew to Doha to sign a unity deal with Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization. A few months later, the Palestinian leadership went to the United Nations seeking to bypass direct negotiations.

While Israel makes tangible concessions to advance peace, the Palestinian leadership has let every window of opportunity fly out of the window. This goes to the very heart of the problem. The Palestinians pledge dialogue while fomenting hatred. They promise tolerance while celebrating terrorists. And they make commitments almost as quickly as they break them. The Palestinian leadership recently broke a commitment by applying to join 15 international treaties and conventions. It seems to me that they have forgotten that they also have to abide by those treaties and address the

rampant persecution of women, children and minorities in Palestinian society.

Winston Churchill is famously quoted as saying "The farther backward you look, the farther forward you can see". Only those who can look back and see the patterns in history can prevent the same mistakes from occurring over and over again. Nine months ago, Israel and the Palestinians returned to the negotiation table and set a deadline of 29 April — today — for reaching an agreement. True to form, the Palestinians have performed their distinctive two-faced two-step. When Israel tries to tango with Abbas, we find ourselves abandoned on the dance floor as Abbas waltzes off with Hamas.

The Palestinians have made a career out of squeezing more and more compromises out of Israel without granting a single tangible compromise of their own. In the latest round of peace negotiations, Israel agreed to do what no other Government in the world would even consider, releasing coldblooded murderers. Imagine the pain felt by Israelis every time they watched those terrorists receive a hero's welcome from President Abbas. If these are the values that the Palestinians are embracing, no wonder they are running into the arms of Hamas.

All those in the international community who are here today to commend and support the unity Government agreement are in fact lending legitimacy to terror attacks against Israel. Hamas makes no secret of its intentions. Its Charter calls for the destruction of Israel. Article 7 says, "The Day of Judgement will not come until Muslims fight the Jews and kill them". Last week, we received a painful reminder of Hamas's brutality. Baruch Mizrahi, a 47-year-old Israeli father of five was driving with his family when the car was attacked by Palestinian terrorists. Baruch was murdered and his wife and nine year-old son wounded. Hamas leader Haniyeh praised the attack, saying that the killing brought back life to the path of resistance, and he commended the heroes of Hebron.

The Palestinian Authority's unity with Hamas will only bring greater impunity for the terrorists who fire rockets into our cities. In 2006, when Hamas took control of Gaza, the international community devised the Quartet principles in order to prevent international funding from flowing to terrorist organizations. The conditions the Quartet set were that Hamas must renounce violence, recognize Israel and abide by prior agreements. Some have even rushed to bless the Hamas and Fatah union faster than a Las Vegas marriage clerk. I have yet to hear Hamas agree to any of the Quartet's conditions. Instead of choosing peace with Israel, Abbas has chosen peace with Hamas. Israel wants to negotiate with a single legitimate entity representing the Palestinian people, but it will not negotiate with a Palestinian Government backed by Hamas. If Hamas is in the back office, Israel will not be at the negotiating table. Anyone who wonders why Israel will not negotiate with Hamas might as well be wondering why nobody shows up to dinner parties thrown by Hannibal Lecter.

As we speak, millions of dollars are being channeled to the Palestinian Authority. Now that the Palestinians have signed a unity agreement, that funding will be at the disposal of Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization. I wonder how taxpayers in London, Luxembourg and Paris will feel knowing that they will enable Hamas to launch more rockets into Israel, kidnap more Israelis and send more suicide bombers into our cafés. Not a day goes by when Hamas does not seek Israel's destruction. Last month, the Israel Defense Forces intercepted a cargo ship sent by Iran, carrying advanced weaponry destined for the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. The weapons included rockets, ammunition and missiles capable of striking the very heart of Israel.

The international community is quick to condemn Israel, but never says a word when Israelis are the victims of unrelenting attacks. How many times has the international community criticized Israel for restricting the entry of certain dual-use goods into Gaza? You do not have to be Christopher Columbus to discover that a second country borders Gaza, yet it is never, ever mentioned by the Security Council. And how many times has the Council criticized Israel for restricting the entry of construction materials? And yet when Israel does allow cement into Gaza, instead of building the Palestinian people up, Hamas is committed to tearing them down. They could be using the cement to build schools, homes and hospitals, but instead they build terror tunnels to smuggle weapons and attack Israel. If the international community is truly committed to advancing peace, it must stop pointing fingers at Israel and demonstrate real resolve. The Palestinians must be held accountable for their actions. Targeting civilians must be unacceptable, and acts of terror should be condemned publicly and unequivocally.

"No matter how big the lie, repeat it often enough and the masses will regard it as the truth", is a remark

that has been attributed to President John F. Kennedy. The Palestinians and the Arab States send letter after letter and lodge complaint after complaint filled with lies, misinformation and half-truths. Most recently, they launched a campaign accusing Israel of impeding freedom of worship and denying access to religious sites. Certain parties have even criticized remarks made in our Parliament. I know that freedom of expression is a foreign concept to most regimes in the Middle East. One is about as likely to hear a Saudi disagree with his Government as to see a Saudi woman behind the wheel of a race car in the next Indianapolis 500 — or any car, for that matter.

Israel is the only nation in the Middle East that grants full religious rights to people of all faiths. After reuniting Jerusalem in 1967, Israel abolished discriminatory laws and introduced religious freedoms that allow millions of Muslims and Christians to visit and pray at their holy sites. Every year, millions of people visit Jerusalem to celebrate their holy days. The vast crowds pose considerable public safety challenges, but Israel is committed to ensuring that Jerusalem is an open city for all faiths and one that celebrates religious tolerance and diversity.

This is in stark contrast to the Palestinians' treatment of minority faiths. Since the Hamas takeover of Gaza in 2007, more than half the Christian community has fled. They face a grim choice: convert to Islam or face the sword. In Bethlehem, which has been under Palestinian Authority control since 1995, the Christian population has fallen dramatically. Gunmen have terrorized the Christian community and looted and desecrated the Church of the Nativity, one of Christianity's holiest sites.

One might think that the United Nations would make every effort to support Israel's protection of religious freedoms. Instead of taking constructive actions to help mitigate the sensitive situation, Robert Serry, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East, took destructive steps that aggravated tensions on the ground. It is unfortunate that a United Nations official abused his position and the United Nations platform to express his personal opinions. Both Mr. Serry and the Arab nations need reminding that core issues, including Jerusalem, must be dealt with at the negotiating table and not by parties tabling false accusations.

In its 65-year history, Israel has not experienced a single day in which it was not confronting terrorist groups — Hamas in the south and Hizbullah in the north. This month alone, authorities in Thailand foiled a plan by Hizbullah agents to attack Israeli tourists and Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah took responsibility for planting a roadside bomb in northern Israel. His admission offers concrete proof that Hizbullah is operating south of the Litani river, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006).

Both Hamas and Hizbullah receive funding and support from the world's primary sponsor of terrorism Iran. A close look at Iranian foreign policy reveals that their strategy is to defy — "D, E, F, Y": deceive, evade, falsify and yield absolutely nothing. Iran has violated numerous resolutions aimed at curbing its nuclear programme and it continues to evade International Atomic Energy Agency inspections. Iran's campaign to convince the world that its nuclear programme is peaceful should have earned the regime at least an honorary mention at the Oscars for best acting and best adapted screenplay from a work of fiction.

Clearly the production is working. At a time when sanctions should be increased they are being eased. Make no mistake, if you leave Iran as a threshold nuclear Power, you will be leaving the world on the threshold of the abyss. Unravelling the sanctions regime against Iran might prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon today, but it would virtually ensure that Iran has a nuclear weapon tomorrow. That must not be allowed to happen. Iran's nuclear weapons capability and long-range missile capability should be fully dismantled.

None of this can disguise the fact that Iran is one of the world's worst human rights abusers. The regime is holding 1,000 people, including 35 journalists, as so-called political prisoners. Last year, Iran executed 624 people — that is an average of two executions per day. Among these so-called criminals were 28 women, three children and a poet named Hashem Shaabani. Shaabani's so-called crime was criticizing the regime's treatment of minorities. The regime declared him a an "enemy of God" and hanged him. This offers further proof that the so-called justice system in Iran is nothing short of an injustice. The messages of hate and intolerance come straight from the top. Iran's Supreme Leader of Holocaust denial, Ayatollah Khamenei, is the head of the outlaw regime and continues to make outlandish claims.

Yesterday Israel marked Holocaust Remembrance Day. We recall how nations dismissed the murderous Nazi rhetoric and downplayed the seriousness of the

danger. Ultimately, the Second World War claimed the lives of 60 million people, including six millions Jews. Today, in the face of Iran's nuclear ambitions, what has the world really learned? The facts are clear and the threat is very real. Iran is fanning the flames of conflict across the Middle East. Rouhani and Assad are brothers in bloodshed directing the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Not satisfied at having murdered the Syrian people with chemical weapons, snipers and barrel bombs, they are now intentionally besieging entire neighbourhoods and using starvation as a tool of war.

The State of Israel is appalled by the violence. In the face of the horrendous suffering, we are speaking out against Al-Assad's ruthlessness. And in the face of the unspeakable cruelty, we are acting compassionately and providing medical treatment to hundreds of Syrians. The Syrian people have seen first-hand that Israel values human life above all else. This is a rare quality in the Middle East. Repressive Arab regimes have kept their people poor and uneducated. They have brutally and mercilessly suppressed their rights. And they have poisoned their people's minds with hatred.

Blaming Israel will not solve the problems plaguing the Middle East. It will not stop Al-Assad from dropping barrel bombs or create jobs for the hungry masses in Egypt or empower women in Saudi Arabia. The Palestinians must be held accountable for their actions. Sanctions against Iran must extract a real price. And dictators should not be allowed to target and torture civilians with impunity.

Someday, I hope that we will read about attacks on the Jewish people in history books rather than newspapers. Someday, I hope that Israel will be accepted as the nation-State of the Jewish people by every Member of this Organization. And someday, I hope that Israeli children will grow up free from war. But that day has not yet come. As we prepare to celebrate Israel's sixty-sixth anniversary as a free and independent State, I wish to reaffirm the commitment made in our Declaration of Independence:

> "We offer peace and unity to all the neighbouring States and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all."

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Mr. Serry for his thorough briefing. I will begin remarks today by addressing Israeli-Palestinian issues before turning to Syria and Lebanon.

The United States recognizes that the path to a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East is littered with obstacles, but we also believe that the goal is as essential as the process is turbulent. For this reason, we will continue to support negotiations between the parties. However, ultimately, the choice is up to the leaders and their people. None of us can make the difficult decisions required for peace, and the parties have decided to take a pause in the negotiations.

We have clearly reached a difficult moment, but we continue to believe that there is only one real viable solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: two States living side-by-side in peace and security. And if the parties are willing to go down that path, we will be there to support them. In that connection, we are grateful for the strong support the negotiations have received from the League of Arab States, the European Union, the Quartet and other key partners. We will continue to look to them in the weeks and months ahead.

Regarding the recent announcement by Fatah and Hamas that they intend to form a technocratic Government to prepare for new elections, the timing of the announcement was clearly unhelpful in terms of efforts that were under way between the parties to reach an agreement on extending the negotiations.

The United States and the other members of the Quartet have been clear about the principles that must be accepted by the Palestinian Government in order for it to achieve peace and build an independent Palestinian State. Those principles have not changed. Any Palestinian Government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to non-violence, recognition of the State of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations between the parties. President Abbas has been committed to these principles and has declared that any Government he forms will be committed in the same way. If a new Palestinian Government is formed, we will assess it based on its composition and actions as well as its adherence to these principles.

We continue to oppose unilateral actions that seek to circumvent or prejudge outcomes that can be negotiated only between the parties, including efforts to enhance Palestinian claims to statehood absent a negotiated final-status agreement. Similarly, we continue to view

Israeli settlements in the West Bank as illegitimate, and oppose any efforts to establish new settlements, expand existing ones or legalize settlement outposts. Our positions on other aspects of the process are also well known and have not changed.

The United States remains deeply concerned by the up-tick in tensions and violence at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound around the Passover and Easter holidays, and urges all parties to redouble efforts to reduce tensions while maintaining the status quo. We continue to maintain high-level engagement on that issue. My Government also condemns other acts of violence, including rocket strikes into Israel from the Gaza Strip, the 14 April murder of an Israeli police official, and settler attacks and demolitions directed against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank. We call upon all concerned to avoid incidents that might make further disturbances likely. We look to the authorities on both sides to investigate and hold accountable persons responsible for acts of violence. We also call on both sides to respect the terms of the November 2012 ceasefire involving Israel and Gaza.

In addition, the United States remains troubled by the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Several United Nations relief projects, which are important to improving the conditions there, are still awaiting Israeli approval. We urge all parties to continue to work together to increase the access of humanitarian supplies into that area.

Let me now turn to Syria, where the devastating conflict is now in its fourth year and where the violence continues, the number of refugees is still going up and the flow of humanitarian aid remains a trickle compared to the overwhelming need. Earlier this month, many of us attended a presentation during which we saw graphic photographs depicting the torture and industrial-style killing of some 11,000 Syrian detainees. Those photographs illustrate but a small fraction of the horrors inflicted by the Al-Assad regime. We must add to that the victims of chemical attacks and barrel bombs, the families deprived of food by the Government's starve-or-surrender policy, the patients forcibly removed from hospitals and the many thousands of people who have disappeared or remain in detention.

I realize that those facts are all too familiar to Council members and the broader international community, but I stress them because we must never become resigned or inured to the devastation that is taking place daily in Syria and to the Syrian people. We must keep this litany of horror before us and remain steadfast in our determination to end the killing and to hold the perpetrators of those crimes accountable.

At the same time, we should be neither surprised nor deceived by the Syrian Government's cynical choice of this inopportune moment to schedule a presidential election. Although we all look forward to the day when meaningful balloting can take place in Syria, that day is not 3 June or any time in the near future. Although credible elections have been held in the midst of conflict, such a process is inconceivable in Syria today, where the regime has crushed political dissent and nearly half of the population is displaced by war, including millions of potential voters who have been forced to flee the country. Inside Syria, do we reasonably expect the 242,000 people in besieged areas, or the more than 3.5 million in hard-to-reach areas, to vote in those elections, when the regime systematically denies them access even to food and medicine? Does anybody expect the regime to enfranchise those it has decided to starve?

Regime-sponsored elections are inconsistent with the United Nations-led Geneva process and threaten to further undermine the prospects for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. My Government joins with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi in calling on the Government to postpone the balloting and to instead focus on the steps clearly defined in the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) to create an atmosphere in which a positive electoral process might move forward.

The humanitarian situation, which has been calamitous for many months, has grown even worse of late. The regime's failure to implement resolution 2139 (2014) has wasted valuable time and claimed many more lives. The conditions remain dire across the country, but most notably in Homs, Aleppo and in areas near Damascus, such as the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp. We should all be clear about where the fault for that deterioration lies. It is the regime that, with the stroke of a pen, could allow cross-border assistance to reach millions in need. But it does not. It is the regime that continues to pound Syrian civilians with ruthless barrel bombs. It is the regime that has coldly integrated the denial of humanitarian assistance into its ever-expanding arsenal of weapons against the Syrian people.

In addition, as my Government and others have noted, we have indications that a toxic chemical — probably chlorine — was used in an attack this month against the opposition-dominated village of Kafr Zita. Those reports and others are extremely serious and are of profound concern to the international community. We welcome today's announcement that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is sending a mission to Syria to determine the facts on alleged gas attacks. Syria must immediately and fully cooperate with such fact-finding, and anybody responsible for such attacks must be held accountable.

Finally, with respect to Lebanon my Government remains concerned about the fragile security situation, including tensions along the blue line, repeated cross-border violations by Syria, ongoing sectarian violence and Hizbullah provocations, such as last month's attack against Israeli soldiers in the Shebaa Farms region. The United States urges calm and hopes that all parties will refrain from violence and adhere to the Government's disassociation policy, as enshrined in the Baabda Declaration. We urge as well the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), which require the disarmament of militia.

Lebanon's leaders face the challenge of working together to address the host of security, economic and humanitarian problems confronting the country. As we have discussed, that challenge is exacerbated by the needs to host the now more than 1 million refugees from Syria living within Lebanon's borders. As a member of the International Support Group for Lebanon, we urge the international community to respond to that epic humanitarian crisis by providing robust financial and other backing through the various funding mechanisms that are available.

On the political side, it is important for the Cabinet to continue to steer Lebanon on the sustainable course of moderation. Lebanon's political leaders have a responsibility to their citizens and to their country's Constitution to conclude the recently initiated presidential selection process by 25 May. That is a Lebanese undertaking that should, and must be determined by Lebanon alone, free from outside interference. Both presidential and parliamentary elections must be conducted in a free, fair and timely manner.

At Wadi Araba 20 years ago, Jordan's King Hussein asked us to envision a Middle East in which there would be "no more death, no more misery, no more suspicion, no more fear, no more uncertainty of what each day will bring". That vision, at that time, seemed far more within our grasp than is the case today. Our task — and it is an urgent one — is to reverse course and restore a sense of progress and hope to the region. To that goal, I pledge my own Government's best efforts and respectfully welcome others'.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Today, 29 April, is the deadline of the nine-month time frame set for reaching an agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis. From the beginning, we have supported that new round of peace talks on which, despite all the foreseen challenges, many hopes were laid. It is unfortunate that our worst fears have been realized. Once again, the monopolization of the negotiation process between the Israelis and the Palestinians by the United States of America was unjustified; the achievement of positive results in such circumstances was not possible.

Serious differences on final status issues concerning the Palestinian territories were reaffirmed and the key problems remain the status of Jerusalem, the borders of the future Palestinian State, Israeli settlement activity and the Palestinian refugees. In that context, we are concerned about the decision of the Israeli Government, taken several days before the agreed deadline, to cease dialogue with the Palestinians. My country can only regret that such a decision was linked to the right of Palestine, as a non-member observer State of the United Nations, to participate in several international treaties and conventions. In addition, another reason cited by the Israelis for its decision was an agreement among Fatah, Hamas and other Palestinian organizations to form a national unity Government.

In that context, of extreme importance was the statement made by Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, at the meeting of the Palestinian Liberation Organization on 26 April in Ramallah, to the effect that the future technocratic Palestinian Government will adhere to the principle of the rejection of violence, the recognition of the State of Israel, and respect for previous agreements on the Middle East peace process.

We in Moscow have always believed that, without the consolidation of the Palestinian ranks in line with the Palestine Liberation Organization platform and the Arab Peace Initiative, it will be impossible to realize the legal aspirations of the Palestinian people for a

fair and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue. Overcoming the Palestinian divisions is a goal that the international community has hoped for in calling for a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East question. We are convinced that, without Palestinian unity, any agreements achieved between Palestine and Israel will not last.

The national unity of the Palestinians should not be jeopardized. At this crucial moment, it is extremely important to not allow the Palestinian and Israeli issue to be derailed. To that end, the two parties must refrain from any provocative actions that would cause a deterioration in the situation, first and foremost in terms of settlement activity and the freezing of customs fees and duties to Palestine. We strongly condemn rocket launches against Israeli territory and any other terrorist acts, which cannot be justified. In the current situation, we consider it to be of prime importance that all parties practice zero tolerance for such actions and any other actions that could be an obstacle to the negotiating efforts.

Despite the complexity of the situation and the Middle East peace process, the Russian Federation is strongly convinced that it should not be abandoned, and will continue endeavour to resume the peace process, both bilaterally and in international forums, first and foremost within the Quartet. We note with satisfaction the recent increased activity of the Quartet, in particular its 2 April meeting in Jerusalem with special representatives. They hold regular teleconferences, and we are maintaining our contacts with both Israeli and Palestinian partners. The mechanism for Russian/Palestinian consultations for exchanges of views on the situation concerning the Palestinian track of the Middle East peace process is functioning. We are convinced that the main task remains a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue on the basis of the well-known international legal framework, with the goal of ensuring a peaceful and safe future for the peoples of Israel and Palestine.

On the Syrian crisis, we see no alternative to a political and diplomatic settlement on the basis of the 2012 Geneva communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/522, annex). We are in favour of rapidly launching a third round of inter-Syrian talks, especially because the agenda has basically been agreed. As is the case with the Palestinian and Israeli negotiations, we should seize any opportunity to find a political and negotiated solution in the Geneva framework.

We consider terrorism to be the main threat, in the context of the Syrian conflict, and the so-called moderate opposition should decisively dissociate themselves from terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front and should broaden their negotiating delegation to include the patriotic forces and internal opposition.

An important task, in our view, is to unite the Syrian forces to prevent the creation, in their country, of a stronghold of global terrorism and extremism. We note with satisfaction that the Syrian authorities at this point have been able to remove over 92 per cent of the chemical agents from their country under the programme for the elimination of the Syrian chemical programme despite the serious challenges in the area of security, which have been deliberately ignored by many external players over the past several months.

We hope for the successful holding of presidential elections in Lebanon. That would enable the effective functioning of all State structures to continue and for the Lebanese society to consolidate in the interests of stabilizing the situation and reducing inter-faith tensions. We strongly support the Lebanese people, as once again shown at the meeting held in Moscow last week between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and Lebanon.

Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea): I thank Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry for his briefing.

We are concerned that the peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine have not produced any meaningful progress before the deadline. The situation on the ground has also been worsening. Harmful activities, including continued settlement construction, controversy over the release of prisoners, rocket attacks on populated areas in Israel and strong Israeli reprisals have driven both sides to further confrontation and mistrust.

Despite those setbacks, we still think that the door to negotiations is not closed as long as all sides do not give up on the goal of a more sustainable future for all. All possibilities should continue to be explored, including by building on the mediation efforts of the United States, with the full support of the international community. The role of the United Nations as part of the Quartet should not be overlooked in continuing the negotiation efforts.

As for the recent reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas, in order for that reconciliation to proceed in a positive direction, we believe that it should to contribute to the peace negotiations and avoid any violence and confrontation. At the same time, it should lead to genuine democracy and well-being for all Palestinian people.

Turning to the situation in Syria, we are gravely concerned about the unprecedented scale of death and destruction, as the conflict enters its fourth year. We strongly condemn the indiscriminate aerial bombardments and ground assault now taking place against densely populated civilian areas in Homs. Gross violations of human rights and systematic war crimes are ongoing. Flagrant violations of international law are also taking place vis-a-vis humanitarian access, as painstakingly articulated in the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2014/295).

The implementation of resolution 2139 (2014) and improvements in the humanitarian situation in Syria are simply not happening. As Under-Secretary-General Amos reported, access to besieged communities has not increased and is in fact getting worse, with only 6 per cent of civilians residing in such areas receiving much-needed assistance. That is simply unacceptable, and we once again call on the Syrian Government and opposition groups to allow unhindered humanitarian access so food and medicine can reach civilians trapped in the crossfire. People are starving and dying of disease as barrel bombs drop overhead, while the Syrian authorities' bureaucratic hurdles are preventing humanitarian access, in contravention of resolution 2139 (2014).

In that connection, we condemn the employment of siege and starvation as methods of warfare, and call for increased cross-border assistance. The Syrian Government should cater to the request of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs so that the most effective routes can be utilized to provide aid to civilians. We appreciate the work of the World Food Programme, World Health Organization, UNICEF, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other humanitarian actors operating in such difficult conditions on the ground.

Regarding Lebanon, spill-over is no longer simply a border issue. Syrian refugees now account for nearly 25 per cent of the total Lebanese population. We are also concerned over the escalating number of terrorist attacks related to the Syrian conflict and condemn last month's attacks on the Lebanese army. We appeal to the Syrian Government and opposition groups to respect Lebanese sovereignty and to all Lebanese actors to refrain from actions in Syria that inflame insecurity in Lebanon, as stipulated in the Baabda Declaration.

To conclude, we reiterate that, as we strive to deal with the crises in the region, greater initiative must be harnessed through active diplomacy and increased cooperation. We need to work together to ensure that not only peace, stability and coexistence but also accountability and justice become a reality for the resilient people of the Middle East.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing.

I will address in order the following topics: the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the situation in Syria, and finally Lebanon.

After nine months of intensive efforts, the talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority are now suspended. We are at the end of the nine-month period envisaged by Israel, the Palestinian Authority and United States Secretary of State John Kerry to reach a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Mr. Kerry and his team have spared no effort to advance the negotiations. We welcome that outstanding commitment.

Despite those efforts, non-compliance with commitments made in July resulted in the suspension of talks, following a scenario that has been repeated many times over the past 20 years. On the one hand, the fourth group of pre-Oslo prisoners was not released; on the other, the Palestinian Authority joined 15 international conventions. The announcement of a freeze of payments of taxes and customs duties collected by Israel to the Palestinian Authority exacerbates the impasse and poses a major threat to the stability of the Palestinian territories.

Those developments have occurred while the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. Settlement has continued and accelerated; it more than doubled in 2013. Tensions worsened in Jerusalem, including on the Temple Mount and around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Motivated by its historical responsibilities with respect to Christians in the Holy Land, France reaffirms its commitment to respect for

places of worship, to which access must be guaranteed, particular during Easter, the most sacred period in the Christian calendar.

It is in that context of crisis that the inter-Palestinian reconciliation agreement was concluded. We believe that the agreement could be a real opportunity, if it results, as announced by President Abbas, in the formation of a national consensus Government composed of independent personalities, under his direct authority, and in the organization of elections in the Palestinian territories. It is not possible, on the one hand, to assert that Israeli-Palestinian agreement is impossible as long as the split between the two Palestinian movements persists, and on the other hand, to consider the inter-Palestinian reconciliation to be an obstacle when it occurs.

France is ready to work with a Government of the Palestinian Authority as long as it clearly expresses its rejection of violence, its commitment to the peace process and acceptance of all agreements, in particular with Israel. Reconciliation defined on that basis would be a step towards achieving a two-State solution.

The talks today are merely suspended. Mr. Abbas has undertaken before the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organization that the future Government rejects violence and recognize Israel. He has made a significant gesture of opening by publicly acknowledging for the first time that "the Holocaust was the most heinous crime in modern history". Those statements must be put to his credit, as they are a gesture of openness that can serve as a basis for the resumption of dialogue between the parties and to the revival of the peace efforts.

We have just heard yet again from both sides the same arguments that try to pin the responsibility for the stalemate on the other. In truth, that repeated rhetoric, Council meeting after Council meeting, underlines once again — as if that were necessary — that the two parties are incapable of moving towards peace by themselves, even if the United States supports their efforts. Sooner or later, we will have to conclude that either we have to give up and leave the conflict to them or the international community will have to decide to intervene with all its weight to reach an agreement whose fundamental parameters are, after all, well known. It is a paradox that, on the one hand, we are able to draft a possible peace treaty in broad strokes, whereas, on the other, every peace initiative has failed one after another.

I now turn to Syria, where the regime adds the absurdity of a parody of a presidential election to the infamy of the denial of humanitarian access. The second progress report of the implementation of the resolution 2139 (2014) presented last week is incontrovertible (S/2014/295). The situation of the civilian population has not improved. The sieges of the cities, three-quarters of which have been led by the regime, have not been suspended or even cut back. Indiscriminate bombing and the policy of terror against civilians continue. All of that is unacceptable.

At the political level, despite calls by Joint Special Representative Brahimi and the Secretary-General himself, Bashar Al-Assad will hold his triumphant re-election on 3 June, when the tragic parody of a presidential election will take place. The decision to hold such an election is contrary to the spirit and the letter of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). Meanwhile, civilians continue to be bombed and massacred. No legitimacy will come out of that phantom election in a country devastated, which takes Syria further and further away from a political solution.

France shares the concern of everyone, as expressed by Ms. Kaag last week, with respect to the alleged use of chlorine gas in Kfar Zita which caused several casualties and many wounded. It goes without saying that the responsible party for the use of chemicals will be held to account, as required by resolution 2118 (2013). I would remind the Council that we want all those who have committed mass crimes in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court for judgement. We are continuing our efforts in that direction.

Finally, we must also send a message of support for Lebanon. In the light of the Syrian crisis, France welcomes the generosity of Lebanon and acknowledges the burden it has taken on in hosting more than a million refugees. It also notes that violations of civil peace in Lebanon and its sovereignty are unacceptable. Lebanon must not be drawn into the cycle of the Syrian civil war. We also recall the importance of the fight against impunity and welcome in that respect the role of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

We are pleased that the National Unity Government formed on 15 February was sworn in by the Parliament and that the latter has resumed its legislative activity. We welcome the new momentum in relaunching institutions, which should be sustained and consolidated, so that Lebanon can meet the enormous challenges it faces. In that context, it is crucial that

the Council reiterate its support for the stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon by calling for presidential elections to be held on schedule, in accordance with the procedures and the Constitution and recalling the importance of avoiding any vacuum at the head of the Lebanese State; by supporting the dissociation policy initiated by President Sleiman which should provide a framework for the future; and calling on the international community to mobilize alongside Lebanon so that it can cope with its crisis on its own.

The meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon in Paris on 5 March allowed for the reaffirmation of the international consensus in favour of unity, stability and sovereignty of Lebanon and for the reiteration of its support for Lebanon as it deals with the multiple impacts of the conflict in Syria. That commitment should be continued in humanitarian, economic and security spheres.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I thank Special Coordinator Serry for his briefing.

We have today arrived at the nine-month mark since final status negotiations resumed between Israel and the Palestinians in July last year. It was the most ambitious and substantial chance to secure a permanent peace in years. The extraordinary and singular nature of that opportunity cannot be overstated. We commend the persistence and patience of the United States in encouraging serious negotiations between both sides. The Israelis and the Palestinians — with the support of the international community — need to confront the urgency of the moment and reach an agreement for talks to continue.

We commend the statesmanship and commitment that President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu displayed in launching negotiations last year, but we urge leaders on both sides to press on. Those who work with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas in their respective Governments must also support the peace process by showing restraint, especially during difficult periods. We urge both sides to refrain from actions or statements that increase tensions on the ground. And any Palestinian unity Government must uphold the principle of non-violence and accept previous commitments the Palestinians have made, particularly on Israel's right to exist. All rocket attacks towards Israel from Gaza must cease.

The economic and security gains that a peace deal would bring to both sides are tremendous. Conversely, the fallout from failed negotiations would be devastating. A just and lasting two-State solution remains in the fundamental interests of both parties and the wider region. We urge both sides not to be diverted by mutual recriminations, but to maintain their political courage so that the immense efforts invested to date do not prove futile.

The Syrian conflict has now entered its fourth year. Nearly half the Syrian population needs assistance; one-third has been displaced and over 2.7 million have fled as refugees to neighbouring countries. Last week, the Foreign Minister of Australia visited Jordan and Lebanon to see first-hand the tragic refugee situation created by this conflict. She announced an increase to Australia's humanitarian response targeted specifically at Syrian refugee children, who make up half the Syrian refugee population.

A political solution is urgently needed, and Joint Special Representative Brahimi has made very sound proposals on how negotiations should be conducted. But the Al-Assad regime's refusal to discuss transition in parallel with security talks — as Mr Brahimi has proposed — demonstrates that it is not interested in serious negotiations, as does President Al-Assad's announcement he will run for re-election as President before substantive negotiations have even begun. The circumstances of the civil war in Syria — a completely fractured country — make genuine elections impossible. They will have no credibility in the eyes of the Syrian people and the international community, and will further undermine the prospects for a solution. The Syrian authorities must return now to the negotiating table.

In the meantime, reality for millions of Syrians remains increasingly desperate and brutal. Despite the unambiguous language in resolution 2139 (2014), indiscriminate weapons continue to be savagely used by the regime against civilians. Some 240,000 civilians remain besieged, the vast majority by regime forces; millions more are in hard-to-reach areas, and are denied food and medecine. The Syrian military strategy, which deliberately targets civilians through indiscriminate aerial bombardment, barrel bombs and surrender-or-starve tactics, is unacceptable.

The Syrian authorities continue to remove medical supplies from humanitarian convoys, and to put up bureaucratic hurdles that prevent the effective distribution of aid. We welcomed the opening of one Syria-Turkey border crossing in March, but there are at

least seven more border crossings that could be opened or better utilized. That needs to happen now. It is the Al-Assad regime that has the primary responsibility for addressing the desperate humanitarian situation in Syria, but there is unavoidable evidence that it is not complying with resolution 2139 (2014). If this persists, the Council will need to take further measures.

The Council has heard recently of further horrific crimes being committed in Syria. It remains essential that those responsible for such crimes — including those outlined in the Caesar report — be held to account. Australia also condemns terrorist acts perpetrated by the jihadist groups Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Jabhat al-Nusra, and the involvement of foreign fighters, including from Lebanese Hizbullah, in this conflict. Extremists have no place in Syria's future. We commend the efforts of Special Coordinator Kaag and her team in assisting Syria to meet its obligations to remove its chemical weapons. It is essential that the final deadline of 30 June be met. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons mission authorized today to establish the facts about the possible use of chlorine in Syria must be given access to all it needs.

The Australian Foreign Minister's visit to Lebanon and Jordan last week reaffirmed our very strong support for both countries as they face increasingly insurmountable humanitarian and security challenges as a direct result of the Syrian crisis. Last month, the millionth Syrian refugee crossed into Lebanon — a staggering 300 per cent increase over one year ago. We also commend Iraq, Turkey and Egypt for their intake of Syrian refugees; international support for all these countries is necessary to manage the burden. During her visit, Foreign Minister Bishop encouraged Lebanon to maintain its policy of disassociation regarding the Syrian conflict. We welcomed the formation of the new Lebanese Government in February, which was a crucial step for the country's political stability. It will be vital that the Lebanese Parliament elect a president by 25 May, as scheduled, and that an incoming President can continue President Sleiman's efforts to unite all Lebanese and act as a force for stability during appallingly this difficult time.

Mr. Cherif (Chad) (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank you, Madam, for having organized this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing.

Today's debate is timely, as the Middle East is going through a critical phase of its current history, characterized by an impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the intensification of deadly fighting in Syria, and volatility in the political and security situation in Lebanon. I shall address the Palestinian issue first.

The peace process is deadlocked after nine months of negotiations under the auspices of the United States of America. The Israelis and Palestinians have been unable to agree on the negotiating principles. The negotiation process requires a favourable political environment and measures that would increase mutual confidence. Peace efforts cannot bear fruit if settlement activities continue, if the blockade on Gaza continues, and if the separation wall continues to eat up Palestinian land. It is perfectly legitimate to ask how the Palestinians will build their future State if Israel continues to modify the demographic data on the ground by flouting the principles of international law, its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions, and its international commitments.

Recent incursions by Israeli police and extremist groups in the Al-Aqsa esplanade, as well as attempts to impose Israeli sovereignty over the holy sites, could enflame tensions, undermine the dialogue process between Israel and Palestine, and destabilize the region as a whole. We call on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to show restraint in their respective statements and to avoid unilateral actions that could further reduce the possibilities of pursuing the peace process. We urge both parties to resume dialogue. We welcome the valiant efforts of Mr. John Kerry, the United States Secretary of State, to encourage the parties to reach a comprehensive agreement. We hope that he will pursue his mediation efforts to ensure a resumption of negotiations.

In addition, it is an absolute necessity to involve other partners with influence on the parties, in particular the European Union and the League of Arab States, which could help to move the process forward. The Palestinian question has been on the agenda of the United Nations for more than 66 years, and the Palestinian people are seeing no glimmer of hope in their efforts to bring an end to the Israeli occupation and

to freely exercise their sovereignty in their territories within their pre-June 1967 borders.

To conclude on that subject, we invite the international community to become further involved in saving the peace process and supporting the two-State solution, for two States living side by side on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions; the Madrid principles, notably land for peace; the road map; previous agreements struck between the parties; and the Arab Peace Initiative.

With regard to the situation in Syria, we deplore the fact that violence is increasing to a worrisome degree each day and that the parties cannot engage in a political dialogue process aimed at a return to peace. Almost 10 million Syrians, almost half of the population of the country, are in need of humanitarian assistance. More than 200,000 Syrians remain besieved in zones controlled by the Government and more than 45,000 in areas controlled by the rebels. More than 136,000 have died and thousands more have been wounded since the beginning of the conflict. The Security Council must play a crucial role in settling that conflict and call for the full implementation of resolution 2139 (2014) to enable secure and unimpeded humanitarian access for the United Nations to help and ease the suffering of the civilian population in besieged cities.

I will conclude my statement by speaking about the situation in Lebanon. In recent months, the country has seen a spiral of violence and a series of terrorist attacks. That is a very worrisome sign of the growing impact of the Syrian crisis on the security and stability of Lebanon. Chad firmly condemns all of those terrorist attacks. The massive influx of refugees from Syria into Libya, which is already approaching 1 million refugees, has seriously impeded the ability of that country to meet the humanitarian needs of the refugees. While we commend the generosity of the Lebanese authorities, we urge the international community as a whole to redouble its efforts to bring substantial assistance to Lebanon, enabling it to improve its means of providing for the refugees.

Social cohesion and consensus among all political actors are needed in Lebanon in order to restore State institutions and to re-establish order and security. We encourage all political stakeholders in Lebanon to demonstrate their unity in the face of the terrorist activities and to move forward on the basis of the laudable progress that has been achieved recently with the formation of a new Government.

In order to assist Lebanon in stabiliizing itself, respect for its soveriegnty and its territorial integrity is crucial. To that end, we call for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend my thanks to Mr. Robert Serry for the comprehensive briefing he gave this morning.

The efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East are passing through a very sensitive stage due to the lack of meaningful progress and stagnation in the negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, despite the intensive, continuous and commendable efforts undertaken by the United States and other influential international actors. Reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question on the basis of a two-State solution is at the core of solving the conflict in the region and is a strategic regional and international interest. Failure to do so will expose all countries in the region and its peoples, who are increasingly frustrated, to new and unprecedented waves of tension and violence. That failure will have serious repercussions, not only for the region, but also on international peace and security.

It is necessary to intensify international efforts to establish an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the borders of 4 June 1967, based on the two-State solution and the relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. The achievement of that goal is a high priority for Jordan, and we underscore, in particular, that all agreements on final status issues must uphold Jordan's high priorities.

(*spoke in English*)

I would like now to focus my attention on why the recent actions by leading right-wing members of the Israeli Government, as well as members of the Israeli Knesset, with respect to the Muslim sites throughout the Haram al-Sharif/Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, as well as the Christian sites in the Old City, are a challenge and threat to Jordan, and to peace and security in the immediate region and beyond.

Over the past few years, the most extreme parts of the Israeli right-wing movement have been intent on overturning the status quo regarding the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Their regular incursions into the compound, which spike in frequency with the observance of religious holidays and occasions, have

been nothing short of provocative and menacing. Moreover, the incursions are gaining in intensity and, if they continue, will tip the situation throughout the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound into a colossal crisis.

Last month, a delegation led by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which included the Chair of the Group of Arab States, the Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, together with the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, the Egyptian Permanent Representative and myself, met with the then President of the Council to deliver a letter, voice our deep concern and follow up on a previous letter sent to the Council by the Arab Group on that subject. While we affirm today everything that was contained in those letters, I will not go into detail word for word.

I will limit myself to the essential features of the broader violations on the part of the Israeli authorities. They consist of the illegal and intrusive excavations on both sides of the wall surrounding the Old City; a blatant disregard for the decisions adopted by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee and the Executive Board of UNESCO; obstructing a UNESCO reactive monitoring mission to the Old City, and renovating parts of the wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque without the approval of the Jordanian side — and I will get to that point shortly — regular incursions by Israeli right-wing politicians, settlers and extremists, as I mentioned earlier, into the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, as well as a recent debate organized in the Knesset aimed at imposing Israeli sovereignty over the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

We join the Arab world and the Islamic Ummah in condemning those irresponsible and inflammatory actions. We are also satisfied that virtually every country in the international community shares a deep concern about those developments, and we welcome their supportive actions in that regard. Ambassador Mansour has spoken eloquently in expressing the Palestinian position on that and, given that the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remains under foreign military occupation, we appeal to colleagues to listen to his words very carefully. I would, however, like to explain how the actions of the extreme Israeli right-wing also threaten Jordanian interests directly. How so?

The Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, together with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, falls under Jordanian custodianship and protection. And any members of the Council who have visited either would have seen Jordanian officials tending to those two sites. Indeed, we have maintained them since 1924, when the Hashemite guardianship over the holy sites was formalized. Presently, it is His Majesty King Abdullah II, who is the Guardian and Custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem.

As we have noted time and again, East Jerusalem is occupied territory under international law. The International Court of Justice has affirmed that. In paragraph 78 of its 2004 advisory opinion, citing decisions of this Council, it emphasized the way that international humanitarian law applies to East Jerusalem, as well as to the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

As an occupying Power, Israel is also under obligation, by virtue of article 56 of the 1907 Hague Regulations, which reflects an established rule of customary international law to treat religious institutions, even when State-owned, as private property. As such, the rights that derive from private ownership under international law apply, including the right of the holder of such rights — in this case the Jordanian Awqaf department — to administer its property without interference from the occupying Power. As such, Israel may not interfere with any aspect of the administration of worship in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, except to ensure the safety and security of the site. That is an obligation more than a right, and must be carried out without undermining the exercise of religious administration of the Awqaf department.

Paragraph 2 of article 9 of the Jordan-Israeli peace treaty reflects the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and article 5 of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, to which Israel is a party, also imposes a clear obligation on that country to support the "competent national authorities ... in safeguarding and preserving its cultural property". In that respect, I would like to make two points. First, the Jordanian Awqaf was the national authority when East Jerusalem was occupied and has remained so continuously since June 1967. Secondly, Israel's actions undermine the exercise by the national authority of its role in preserving the Al-Aqsa Mosque by allowing Israeli incursions and violations. Naturally, the draft law discussed last month in the Knesset on the extension of sovereignty aims to overturn, unlawfully,

the national authority's role as the custodian of that cultural property.

Moreover, in March 2013 an agreement signed by His Majesty King Abdullah II and President Mahmoud Abbas reaffirmed the status of His Majesty as the Custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem. Under that agreement, His Majesty enjoys the full right to exert all legal efforts to safeguard Jerusalem's holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, the Dome of the Rock, all its mosques, buildings, walls, courtyards over and beneath the ground and the Waqf properties connected to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the churches in the Old City of Jerusalem, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Unless the threat to the Al Aqsa Mosque compound from the extreme right-wing movement is reversed, it will not only provoke a massive crisis with the Muslim world and even parts of the Christian world, but will also obviously, given what I have just said, pose a direct threat and challenge to one of the two neighbours with whom Israel has a peace treaty. Such actions and incitements must therefore end, and end permanently, for the sake of a region that can ill afford yet another crisis, especially since this would be anything but yet another crisis. Rather, it would be the crisis to overwhelm all others, and one that we must do everything in our power to prevent.

Ms. Kazragiene (Lithuania): I wish to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, for his briefing.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

Let me start with the Middle East peace process. The last time we spoke, my delegation, like all those around this table, urged the two parties to seize the rare opportunity created by the perseverance and dedication of United States Secretary of State Kerry to firmly pursue the path of negotiation and to abstain from any moves and actions that could damage the historic chance for an agreement that would lead to a viable two-State solution, with both peoples living in peace and security, paving the way for economic and other ties and exchanges that would benefit all — Israelis, Palestinians, their neighbours and the rest of the world.

That chance is now slipping away. Israelis and Palestinians deserve a life of peace, security and safety in their homes. We cannot allow a further escalation of violence, more bloodshed and more human tragedy in an already highly volatile region. It is in the interest of Israelis and Palestinians alike to return to the path of negotiation. We reiterate our call to the two parties to exercise maximum restraint and to abstain from any actions and violence that could further aggravate this very difficult and delicate moment. Political will and leadership of the highest order are required from both sides.

My delegation expresses grave concern regarding the recent authorization of a new settlement in Hebron. All settlement expansion and demolitions, as well as all acts of incitement and violence from both sides, must stop immediately. We are also seriously concerned about the recent disturbances at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount complex, which is sacred to Muslims and Jews alike. Both sides must demonstrate responsibility and do everything possible to prevent a further escalation of the situation. The settlement of all outstanding issues must be pursued by way of dialogue between the parties.

Lithuania condemns the attacks on Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip, including those during the Easter and Passover holidays. In light of intra-Palestinian reconciliation, Hamas must fully subscribe to the Quartet principles and renounce violence, adhere to previous agreements and recognize Israel's legitimate right to exist.

As I turn to the situation in Syria, I cannot but refer to the recent report (S/2014/295) of the Secretary-General on the implementation of — or rather the failure by the parties to the conflict to implement — resolution 2139 (2014) . The Secretary-General clearly states that civilians are not being protected and that humanitarian access to those most in need is not improving.

The warring parties in Syria, the Syrian regime in particular, continue to violate the Geneva Conventions, international humanitarian law and the human rights of the Syrian people, including the most basic right of all — the right to life. Humanitarian access remains intermittent and malnutrition remains severe. War crimes and crimes against humanity, predominantly committed by the Government of Syria, are mounting. Sieges, aerial bombings, shellings and the barbaric use of barrel bombs continue unabated, causing even more destruction, suffering and death among the civilian population. Impunity reigns.

The Council's recent Arria Formula meeting on the so-called Caesar report revealed horrifying facts

about the industrial-scale torture and forced starvation campaign carried out by Syria's regime. The Council cannot afford to remain silent on the humanitarian situation, and it cannot ignore Syria's continuing non-compliance with resolution 2139 (2014). Tolerating violence and impunity breeds more violence and impunity. The Syrian people have already lost and suffered too much. It is time to act. We must use the tools at our disposal to drive home the message that there is no escaping accountability and justice. One such tool is the referral of Syrian case to the International Criminal Court. Let me touch upon two other issues related to Syria.

First, with respect to presidential elections, holding elections in June in a country that has never had a real election, in the midst of war and under the most extreme humanitarian circumstances is a travesty of legitimacy and a mockery of elections. Can anyone imagine polling stations being set up in Aleppo, Homs or any other city, town or village in Syria under constant and real threat to human lives, or in the various locations inaccessible due to siege? Or polling stations being set up where food and basic humanitarian necessities have not been able to enter for months? What about the votes of the refugees and displaced persons, whose numbers have reached some 9 million?

Furthermore, such elections clearly contradict the letter and the spirit of the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/523, annex). The Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, has voiced deep concern about the impact of such an election on the chances of a resumption of the Geneva talks.

Secondly, each State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention undertakes not to use chemical weapons, including toxic chemicals and their precursors, under any circumstances. The alleged use of chlorine gas against the Syrian population violates that commitment and raises the issue of accountability. The case must be promptly and thoroughly investigated. Lithuania is also concerned about recent reports of certain discrepancies in the chemical weapons removal process that may indicate that the Syrian authorities have retained the ability to deploy chemical weapons. This too must be investigated and clarified.

I would also like to say a few words on the dangerous and highly damaging impact that the spillover of the Syrian crisis has had on its neighbours. In Lebanon, for example, shelling, shooting and aerial incursions into its border zone from Syria, as well as movements of armed fighters and war material between the countries, have become part of the daily reality of life. And yet Lebanon stoically keeps its doors open to refugees from Syria, who now total 1 million. Lebanon needs the political support and assistance of the international community. The Government of Prime Minister Tammam Salam, formed in February, has a lot to grapple with, including holding this year's elections within an established time frame. We reiterate our call to all parties in Lebanon to adhere to a policy of dissociation from the Syrian conflict, uphold the Baabda Declaration and maintain a national dialogue. The Security Council's strong and unanimous support to Lebanon remains critical to preserving its sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing.

Luxembourg fully associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

The peace process in the Middle East is at a critical stage. The settlements are expanding, in violation of international law, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is deteriorating, and provocative statements by extremists on all sides are proliferating. The rocket attacks on Israel continue; tensions have been growing on the Temple Mount and, more recently, around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem; and violence persists on the part of settlers, who go largely unpunished.

Nine months of talks have not enabled an agreement — or even a framework for negotiations on a final status agreement — to be reached. But the talks should nonetheless not stop. Everyone knows that only dialogue will enable a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be found. We therefore reiterate our full support for the United States Administration's efforts and urge both parties to remain engaged in this process, aimed at creating a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living in peace and security side by side with Israel and with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

With its European Union partners, Luxembourg has consistently called for inter-Palestinian reconciliation under the leadership of President Abbas. It is that reconciliation alone that can improve the viability of

a future peace agreement and ensure the unity of a Palestinian State that incorporates the West Bank and Gaza Strip. We hope that reconciliation will enable national elections to be held as soon as possible and ensure Palestinian institutions' democratic legitimacy.

We welcome President Abbas's commitment to respecting the principle of non-violence, supporting a two-State solution and honouring all agreements and obligations previously contracted, including the recognition of Israel's legitimate right to exist. In that context, we welcome the clear terms in which President Abbas condemned the Holocaust the day before yesterday, calling it the most heinous crime against humanity of the modern era. The fact that President Abbas remains fully in charge of the negotiation process, with a mandate to negotiate in the name and on behalf of all Palestinians, is, in our view, an assurance that the peace negotiations can and should continue. The considerable efforts made in the last few months should not be in vain. Negotiations must resume in order to put an end to the occupation implement a two-State solution.

I now turn to the situation in Syria. We are firmly convinced that the only solution to the Syrian conflict is a political one. But how can we reach it when the Syrian authorities put off the issue of a political transition indefinitely? How can we reach it when President Al-Assad fiercely persists in his scorched-earth policy, with his eye on the next presidential election — elections that Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi has rightly termed incompatible with the Geneva process? A leader committed to seeking a political solution does not put the opposition's representatives on a list of terrorists, confiscate their property or threaten and imprison their family members in order to torture them. A leader committed to seeking a political solution does not persist in an all-out military, killer assault, bombing civilians and starving its own people, its women and children. A leader committed to seeking a political solution does not seek re-election in a travesty of an election when half the population are displaced or refugees.

In order to uphold international humanitarian law in Syria, resolution 2139 (2014), which we adopted two months ago, made a series of very clear demands. It asked for an immediate end to indiscriminate attacks against civilians, such as aerial bombing and the use of barrel bombs; for immediate humanitarian access to areas that are difficult to reach, including across conflict lines and borders, and by the most direct routes; and for the removal of bureaucratic obstacles to delivering aid. Based on the Secretary-General's first two monthly reports on the implementation of resolution 2139 (2014), only one thing is clear — that the parties to the conflict, particularly the Syrian authorities, have not responded to the Security Council's demands. The proof of that is the continuing and intensified barrel-bomb attacks on civilians; the roughly 242,000 people who are still under siege; the 3.5 million who still live in areas that are difficult to access and who receive only dribs and drabs of aid; the 5.5 million children who are in danger of becoming a lost generation; and the Syrian officials who are still systematically removing medical supplies from convoys intended for areas controlled by the opposition. That denial of medical assistance to civilian populations is described as arbitrary and unjustified in the Secretary-General's most recent report, which we will discuss tomorrow in consultations with Ms. Valerie Amos.

In resolution 2139 (2014), the Council expressed its intention to take additional measures if the resolution was not complied with. We will have to draw the necessary conclusions, based on our responsibility, our credibility and the authority of the Security Council's binding decisions. We must also insist on the complete elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme. Luxembourg is seriously concerned about the new allegations of the use of chemical substances, particularly in the town of Kafr Zita, near Hama, on 11 April, when explosive barrels filled with chlorine were dropped on civilians, including many children. These new allegations of the use of chemical agents, if confirmed, would constitute a serious violation of resolution 2118 (2013) and the Chemical Weapons Convention. It is therefore essential that the investigative mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons announced today shed some light on the allegations as soon as possible.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our firm belief that the perpetrators of the heinous crimes committed in Syria since March 2011 should be held accountable for their actions. The time has finally come to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. Justice must be rendered and those unconscionable crimes must end.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank you, Madam President, for presiding over today's open debate. I also thank Mr. Serry, Special Coordinator for

the Middle East Peace Process Serry for his briefing. China has listened attentively to the statements made by the observer of Palestine representative of Israel.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East question. Although the Middle East peace process has witnessed more than 20 years of vicissitudes, including major ups and downs, the general trend is towards peace. At present, peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel face critical choices that require firm confidence in peace and patience and courage from both parties.

First, there must be firm confidence in peace. Middle East history has proven time and again that an eye for an eye will only deepen hatred. Only by transforming swords into ploughshares will peace be achieved.

Since the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli peace talks at the end of last July, the positions of both parties have remained far apart and negotiations have been difficult. However, progress towards peace is what the people desire and represents an irreversible trend. A negotiated settlement of disputes represents the right direction towards the right goal. At this critical juncture, both parties must mine strengthened confidence and remain calm.

Secondly, there must be patience in the peace talks. Efforts towards progress in the peace talks cannot achieve results overnight. As long as both parties move resolutely towards a negotiated settlement, results are certain to come about. The principle of land for peace, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and all of the agreements reached between the parties constitute a realistic basis for peace between Palestine and Israel and, furthermore, for reconciliation between the Arab and Jewish nations. Both parties are on the same peace track and should therefore work together for the common good, by demonstrating the patience and perseverance that will eventually lead them to a land of peace.

Thirdly, there must be the courage necessary for tough political decisions. The twists and turns in the Middle East peace process represent an important lesson, namely, that peace talks resemble a struggle against the tide. One must push forward, or otherwise risk being pushed backwards. Peace must be built; it will not self-construct.

Peace talks require proactive efforts. Biding for time is not an option. For Palestine, mutual recognition of the other party's right to exist is an important prerequisite. Mutual accommodation of the other party's concerns is essential.

For Palestine and Israel, mutual recognition of the other party's right to exist is an important prerequisite. The key lies in the need to think from the perspective of the other party. In the current situation, the prompt release of Palestinian prisoners, a halt to the construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, the lifting of the blockade against Gaza and ending the violence against innocent civilians are imperative to maintaining an atmosphere conducive to the peace talks.

Meanwhile, internal reconciliation and improved unity in Palestine will contribute to the goal of an independent Palestinian State. Palestine and Israel should become more proactive and positive in their approach towards the peace talks and the peace process.

China has always attached importance to the question of the Middle East and has made consistent efforts to promote the peace process. One year ago, Chinese President Xi Jinping provided a four-point proposal for settling the question of Palestine. It emphasized that peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel is the right direction to take to settle the issues between Palestine and Israel; peace talks represent the only realistic path to peace; the principle of land-for-peace is an important basis for promoting the Middle East peace process; and international support constitutes an important guarantee of progress in the peace talks.

That four-point proposal fully reflects the Chinese Government's sincere will and practical effort in promoting the Middle East peace process. China will continue to promote the peace talks through various channels and measures in view of strengthening its contribution to peace in the Middle East.

The present situation in Syria remains volatile. The people of Syria continue to suffer. The political process is encountering difficulties. China is highly concerned and remains of the view that war is not an option — violence only begets hatred. The top priority is for all Syrian parties to place the interests of the nation and the country above everything else, end the violence and hostilities as soon as possible, promote an inclusive political transition and comprehensively implement resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2139 (2014) in order to achieve an early political settlement of the question of Syria.

The international community should muster strengthened confidence, persevere in the direction of the political settlement and encourage all Syrian parties, in the spirit of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), to start another round of negotiations as soon as possible in order to achieve a settlement that suits the specific situation of Syria and addresses the concerns of all parties. On the question of Syria, China has always pushed for peace talks, promoted a political settlement and adopted a balanced approach in engaging both parties to the conflict.

China attaches importance to the overall and long-term interests of the people of Syria, seeks to maintain peace and stability in the Middle East, and upholds the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the basic norms of international relations. China is ready to continue its constructive role in efforts to promote a political settlement of the question of Syria.

Mr. Manzi (Rwanda): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this quarterly open debate which allows the Council to reflect on what has transpired in the past three months in the Middle East, as we reflect on the way forward.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his comprehensive briefing. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the observer State of Palestine for their statements.

I will limit my statement to addressing the Middle East process and Lebanon. Regarding the Middle East peace process, today marks the end of the nine-month timeframe that had been set for the parties to have concluded the direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine. But it has ended with minimal achievements; indeed, even with a setback for the reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. It is clear that the conditions set for the extension of the negotiations has been an impediment for both parties to move forward. Nonetheless, the international community and other mediators should not lose hope. We believe that there is no alternative to peaceful negotiations.

We encourage the mediators to continue engaging both sides to make a breakthrough in the stalled negotiations. In that regard, we express our deep appreciation to the United States Government, and especially to Secretary of State John Kerry for his personal commitment to bringing both parties together at the negotiating table. We call on the Quartet to put its full weight behind the prospects of resuming the talks. We call on the parties once again to avoid taking any unilateral actions that might negatively affect the peace process.

We note with concern that the situation in Gaza is deteriorating, with renewed violence affecting the economic and humanitarian conditions of the population. We condemn the continuous firing of rockets and mortar shells from Gaza into Israel, breaching the terms of the November 2012 agreement between Israel and the Gaza authorities.

Rwanda has always supported the solution of two States for two peoples, with a secure State of Israel living side by side with a viable Palestinian State, in peace in security. It is in the interests of both parties to reach a final agreement. We appeal to them to commit to doing so and to embrace the opportunities available in the search for a lasting peace between Israel and Palestine.

I will now turn to Lebanon. Rwanda expresses its strong concern at the continuing spill-over effects of the Syrian conflict in Lebanon. They continue to escalate. We urge all parties involved in the conflict to cease all cross-border attacks. We reiterate that neighbouring countries should respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon. As we all call on the Lebanese authorities to use all of their means to discourage acts that may undermine the security of neighbouring countries.

Finally, we welcome the recent formation of the Government in Lebanon. The international community should continue supporting the new Government to enable it to address the immediate economic, security and humanitarian challenges facing the country. We hope that the President-elect and his Government will uphold Lebanon's sovereignty, unity and stability, as well as the continuity of State institutions and the promotion of dialogue. It is of paramount importance that the Lebanese parties continue to maintain their commitment to the Baabda Declaration and Lebanon's policy of disassociation.

Mr. Barros (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Nigerian delegation for having convened this open debate. We also express our gratitude for the briefing by Mr. Robert Serry on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Chile's position on this issue is well known. My country, which recognized the State of Palestine in January 2011, supports the two-State solution in accordance with the principles set out in relevant United Nations resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 181 (II) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 337 (1973). We do so in the aim of seeing the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel, within secure and internationally recognized borders are established.

Today, with the conclusion of the nine-month period set for negotiations between Israel and Palestine, we see once again the fading hopes of reaching an agreement in the Middle East. We regret that the parties did not seize this opportunity to strengthen dialogue and mutual trust. In particular, we are concerned by unilateral actions and a number of measures that threaten peace. For example, increased settlement building on Palestinian territory, which is illegal under international law, or visits by senior Israeli official to the Temple Mount could incite sectarian extremism. Our country deeply regrets such incidents.

For Chile, it is imperative that the Old City of Jerusalem be shared under the principles of harmony and mutual respect, in recognition of its profound significance for several of the major religions. Moreover, we are concerned by omissions, such as the lack of condemnation of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. Terrorism has no place in this world. In that vein, I would like to say that Chile supports the process of Palestinian reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, agreed in 2012 and ratified on Wednesday, 23 April. We believe that the Palestinian question must be addressed comprehensively and without neglecting the fate of the population living in the Gaza Strip. However, we reiterate our conviction that the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, must renounce armed struggle and recognize Israel's right to exist.

Chile will continue encouraging Israel and Palestine to resume negotiations with a view to achieving just and lasting peace under international law. We cherish the hope that this will be possible.

My country remains concerned about the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. We regret to note that the humanitarian situation has sharply deteriorated and that humanitarian access has not improved. We reiterate our call on all parties to implement resolution 2139 (2014), comply with international humanitarian law and human rights law, ensure the protection of civilians, and establish concrete measures on the ground to allow rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to the affected population.

Regarding the programme removing Syrian chemical weapons, we regret that, despite the progress made, the 27 April deadline for the removal and destruction of chemical material from the territory of Syria was not met. We hope that the goal of the total elimination of the arsenal will be met for 30 June. The international community has made immense efforts to support the process, and now it is for the parties to fully implement resolution 2118 (2013) and the standards of Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Nevertheless, it is important to reiterate that the majority of the victims have been cause by the use of conventional weapons. We reiterate our concern at the reports of possible chlorine gas attacks in Syria, in contravention of the provisions of the CWC and of resolution 2118 (2013). In this regard, we welcome the decision of the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to establish a mission to investigate the alleged attacks.

It is our belief that a political solution is the only possible one. We believe it is quite urgent for the third round of negotiations to be relaunched and for the parties come to them in good faith and in a constructive spirit in order to bridge the gaps between them and move towards the implementation of the Geneva communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/522, annex), in line with the elements agreed upon by the parties and the process proposed by the Special Envoy, whom my country supports.

We remain concerned about the impact of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon's stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We believe it is indispensable that the Lebanese political class renew their coexistence pact and allow themselves to be guided by the dissociation policy established in the Baabda Declaration.

Chile welcomes the parliamentary agreement on the ministerial statement by the Cabinet of Prime Minister Tammam Salam. We appreciate that the agreement was adopted by a broad majority, although we regret that once again the concept of "resistance", which Hezbollah defends, was legitimized. We support the initiatives to strengthen Lebanese institutions so that the State can assume all its functions, such as a monopoly on the use of force and territorial defence. Moreover, we want to

publicly recognize the open door policy with which Lebanon has welcomed Syrian refugees. We hope that in this difficult financial climate, donor countries step up to the plate.

Finally, I note that Chile has deep ties with the communities of the Middle East, and we will thus always be willing to join our efforts with those of the international community to establish avenues for peace and progress for the people of that region.

Mrs. Perceval (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this debate. Our respect and appreciation go to Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Serry for his briefing. I recognize and extend my respect to the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine for their contributions.

This open debate, as others have said, takes place on an important date, and one that is fraught with paradox. A valuable opportunity seems to be slipping away from us, and yet we have come here to hear the actual voices of the international community, which is not resigned to repeated failure.

I would like to repeat here what my Minister for Foreign Affairs said yesterday, representing Argentina in remembering the victims of the Holocaust at the Yad Vashem Museum. He said that we would like to see an Israel living in peace and friendship with its neighbours and in safety. That is the dream pursued not just by the founders of Israel, but also by the Palestinian people. The Minister also stated that we recognize Palestine as an independent State. We have therefore always supported, and will continue to support, the inclusion of Palestine in the various international organizations.

Knowing that the door to the two-State solution would not stay open for long, exactly nine months ago the international community received with hope — the same hope that we have today — the news that Palestinians and Israelis were returning to negotiations. Following that period, which the parties had established as the period in which to reach a final agreement to resolve all outstanding final status issues in order to achieve a just and lasting peace, the outlook is not very encouraging, as we can see for ourselves. Not only did they not reach a final agreement, but they did not reach the more modest goal of a framework agreement and, as of a few days, they had not successfully concluded talks aimed at extending the negotiation period.

During that period, rather than shrink, the gap between the parties' positions seems to have grown wider, and the situation on the ground has evolved in the opposite direction from that needed to establish the conditions necessary for peace. There has been an intensification of the illegal settlements campaign; a sustained increase in the displacements and demolitions in East Jerusalem and Area C; an increase in settler violence; an increase in tensions in places of worship in Jerusalem; and continued clashes between the security forces of Israel and Palestinian civilians in the West Bank. Meanwhile, the indiscriminate firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel has exposed the fragility of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas that was reached in November 2012.

Argentina supports continued dialogue. There is no other way to overcome the conflict. But dialogue cannot be the excuse nor provide the framework with which to consolidate a status quo that is unsustainable. Negotiations have to be substantial, with the clear objective of putting an end to the occupation and achieving full independence for the Palestinian State, living in peace with Israel on the basis of the parameters that enjoy broad consensus among the international community, including the pre-1967 borders.

We are convinced that this is the result that will provide the best security guarantees for Israel, because the failure of negotiations will benefit only the extremists on both sides. Argentina furthermore believes that achieving an agreement fundamentally depends on the decisions taken by the parties and the support received from those outside who are genuinely pursuing peace.

We must be conscious of the fact that we must speak in good faith in our interpretation of what has happened and of what we have failed to do. However, the victims understand full well what has happened and what we have not done. In that respect, we believe that, in addition to providing the necessary incentives, the international community should speak clearly when acts that are not conducive to peace are committed. Therefore, Argentina stresses that the Security Council, in compliance with its institutional responsibilities, must take a more active role in support of the two-State solution, react clearly when attacks occur against Israel, reaffirm the illegal nature of the settlements, and discuss Palestine's request to become a State Member of the United Nations and follow up on General Assembly resolution 67/19.

Finally, Argentina believes that Gaza should be an essential part of the two-State solution. Therefore, we believe that the peace process and intra-Palestinian reconciliation are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually reinforcing to the extent that the latter takes place under the leadership of President Abbas and in line with the Palestine Liberation Organization's commitments, including the recognition of Israel and a renunciation of violence.

Unfortunately, the diplomatic opportunity available in Geneva on 22 January to find an answer to the Syrian tragedy has not yielded the results that we hoped for and the Syrian people need. It is undeniable that, despite having agreed to sit at the negotiating table, the parties and their supporters from outside still believe they can win the war and that they can solve the crisis by military force.

It is therefore not surprising that the successive reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry of the Human Rights Council and the two reports of the Secretary-General (S/2014/208 and S/2014/295) on the implementation of resolution 2139 (2014) confirm that, in their struggle to maintain or gain power, the parties have sought to achieve the military advantage even by violating the fundamental rules governing conflicts.

As a result, it has been noted that more than 100,000 lives have already been lost in Syria and the number of victims of torture, forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, sexual violence, arbitrary detentions, hunger, thirst and fear continues to rise. Millions of Syrians have been displaced within and outside the country, while arbitrary and illegal obstacles deny them of the very basic means for subsistence and ethnic and religious minorities watch with growing fear the growing threat from extremist groups.

Against that backdrop, we cannot allow the reports of the commission and the Secretary-General to become bureaucratic routine or ritual. We cannot resign ourselves to the massacres or become accustomed to these massive violations of human rights as if we were at the theatre and allowing the performance on the stage to become an ongoing topic of discussion. On the contrary, every new report we receive is a cruel reminder of the Council's inability to respond collectively, as well as a sign of hope and of a renewed call for action. Therefore, despite the differences prevailing in the Security Council, which are well known and have been expressed, I have the duty to reiterate Argentina's convictions.

First, we must seriously consider referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, with its corresponding financing, because the magnitude and nature of the violations that have been committed are due to a great extent to the climate of impunity reigning in Syria. Secondly, since January 2013 we have been saying that we must consider measures to restrict the transfer of weapons to all parties because it is clear that weapons in Syria are being used to commit crimes against humanity and war crimes. Thirdly, we must explicitly support Mr. Brahimi as the mediator accepted by the parties so as to contribute to his efforts to help the Syrians find a political solution to the crisis.

We have spoken about reports of presumed new attacks with chemical weapons in Syria. We believe that if these reports are well founded they must be investigated, recalling the provisions Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Syria is now party. At the same time, and although they are not yet complete, we welcome the ongoing efforts to remove chemical weapons from Syria, despite the extremely difficult circumstances. We trust in the sustained commitment of the Syrian Government to meeting its obligations. We hope that the mission will conclude successfully and that its achievement will be a catalyst for ongoing efforts to achieve peace in Syria.

The solidarity of Jordan deserves recognition, and the future of Lebanon also deserves our support and cooperation.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I should like to thank Mr. Serry for his statement and the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their contributions to this debate. I will focus my intervention on the Middle East peace process and Syria.

The future of the Middle East peace process hangs in the balance. Both the Israeli and the Palestinian leaderships need to seize the diminishing opportunity before them and focus on the ultimate goal — a negotiated two-State solution to the conflict, which is so desperately needed for their peoples. During his recent speech to the Knesset, the United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron emphasized the transformative benefits of peace. These include a prosperous Palestinian State living side by side with a safe and secure Israel, normalized relations between States of the region, and a special privileged partnership between the parties and

the European Union. By contrast, the consequences of letting this opportunity pass would be very grave both for the parties and for the region.

With respect to recent announcements on Palestinian reconciliation, let me reiterate that the United Kingdom believes that in order to achieve a lasting peace, it is necessary to end the separation between Gaza and the West Bank and to reunite them under a Palestinian authority that is fully committed to peace with Israel. The United Kingdom has consistently made it clear that we will engage any Palestinian Government that demonstrates through actions that it is committed to the principles set out by President Abbas in Cairo in May 2011.

The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the increase in tension and violence, leading to many deaths of Palestinians and Israelis alike. We condemn the further expansion of Israeli settlements and continued demolition of Palestinian homes, as well as the continued rocket fire by extremist groups in Gaza into Israel. Both are contrary to international humanitarian law. Increasing tensions around the holy sites of Jerusalem are also worrying. The status quo must be maintained and respected. We urge the responsible authorities to maintain calm and avoid letting those with an extremist agenda dictate the atmosphere around the holy sites.

Finally, let me welcome President Abbas's remarks on the Holocaust. The entire international community must stand united against those who deny the terrible truth of the Holocaust.

The situation in Syria worsens every day. The regime continues to act with complete disregard for civilian life, humanitarian needs and resolution 2139 (2014). The Secretary-General has been very clear that the Security Council must act in the event of further non-compliance. Recent credible reports that chemical weapons have again been used by the regime in Syria call into question the regime's commitment to comply with its obligations and to dismantle its programme in full.

We raised our concerns in the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on 11 April, and welcome today's OPCW announcement that it would launch an investigation into these reports. We commend the work of the United Nations-OPCW joint mission, but the situation on the ground is concerning — missed Syrian deadlines, ambiguities in the declaration, alleged recent use of chemical weapons, and limited progress on the destruction of chemical weapons production facilities. As we approach the completion of the extraction phase, the joint mission will continue to have a vital role in ensuring that the Council is fully appraised on compliance with resolution 2118 (2013).

The Syrian people deserve peace and justice. The international community must ensure that all those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity are held to account. The United Kingdom continues to call for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court and will continue to support the moderate opposition in their efforts to protect Syrians from the regime and from extremist groups.

The Al-Assad regime's announcement of elections to be held on 3 June is a cynical attempt to sustain his murderous dictatorship. Elections will be conducted amidst regime attacks on civilians and hundreds of thousands living under regime siege in horrendous conditions. These elections can have no value or credibility when held in a climate of fear, when non-violent opponents to Al-Assad have been detained or disappeared, and when millions of Syrians who live as refugees are prevented from voting.

A clear route to credible elections exists through the establishment of a transitional governing body, as set out in the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). We call on the Al-Assad regime to return to Geneva and to negotiate on the basis of the format and agenda proposed by the United Nations-League of Arab States Joint Special Representative for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi. All Council members bear a responsibility to work for a negotiated political solution, and in particular to put pressure on Al-Assad to engage with the process in good faith.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I first want to thank Special Coordinator Serry not only for his briefing but especially for his abiding commitment to the Middle East peace process. My comments will focus on the Middle East peace process, Syria and Yemen.

I want to say categorically that the road to peace in the Middle East is becoming increasingly slippery. We note that Israel has announced that it is suspending its participation in the talks owing to the reconciliation

between Fatah and Hamas. Coming as it does just two days before the 29 April deadline set in July 2013 by United States Secretary of State John Kerry for the talks to conclude, we must state that it is a considerable setback for the peace process.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has given assurances that as part of the new unity Government in Palestine, Hamas will recognize Israel, commit itself to non-violence and adhere to previous agreements. President Abbas has expressed his continued commitment to peace negotiations with Israel. We expect Abbas to keep the faith. We hope that these pronouncements will reassure Israeli authorities and encourage them to return to the peace talks.

We have heard concerns expressed by well-meaning world leaders about a lack of political will on both sides to make the necessary tough decisions. We are convinced that peace between Israel and Palestine cannot be imposed by the international community. We can only facilitate. Peace must emanate from both parties. It requires the traditional give-and-take that is inherent in peace negotiations. Without equivocation, we want both sides to demonstrate greater flexibility in their long-term strategic interests. In our times, it has become axiomatic that there is no alternative to a two-State solution with Israel and Palestine living together side by side in peace, stability and security.

Turning to Syria, we note the accelerated movement of chemical weapons material to storage sites in the port of Latakia over the past month. With the recent movements, Sigrid Kaag, the Special Coordinator of the joint mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations, confirmed yesterday that the Syrian Government has removed or destroyed in-country approximately 92 per cent of its declared stockpile of chemical weapons material. This renewed commitment on the part of the Syrian Government appears to be a positive development that would facilitate the completion of the task of the Joint Mission of the OPCW and the United Nations.

We share the view of the Secretary-General that the precarious and unstable nature of the security situation underlines the critical importance of expediting the removal of chemical weapons material from Syria as quickly and as safely as possible. At this opportune moment, we encourage the joint mission to continue to engage the Syrian authorities in order to sustain the momentum to complete the removal operations in the coming days.

On the humanitarian situation, it is clear that it is becoming ever more dire as the civil war in Syria intensifies. Repeated calls by well-meaning nations across the world for the warring parties to lay down their arms and embrace dialogue have gone unheeded. The parties to the conflict and their supporters must ensure that civilians are protected regardless of their religion, community or ethnic affiliation. Both the Syrian Government and the armed groups have the legal obligation and moral responsibility to do so. They must take all necessary measures to put an immediate end to violence against civilians, including indiscriminate attacks on civilians. We want to urge all parties to take all necessary measures to provide safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout the country, thereby ensuring the full and immediate implementation of resolution 2139 (2014). A military option would leave in its trail the victors and the vanquished. It would shut the door on a durable peace. That is why we urge the warring parties to return to the peace talks without preconditions.

Regarding Yemen, we take positive note of the progress so far recorded in the political process in the country. The commencement of work by the Constitution Drafting Committee is an indication that Yemen is on the path to sustainable peace, security and stability. The efforts of the Government to put into effect the agreement mediated by the Gulf Cooperation Council on the implementation mechanism for the transitional process is a visible demonstration of its commitment to injecting positive change into the Yemeni domestic arena.

Regarding the report of the National Dialogue Conference, we believe that the speedy implementation of its provisions would engender confidence-building among the different segments of Yemeni society and foster peace among the warring parties. Within the framework of the National Dialogue Conference, the Government now has a unique opportunity to address those issues pertaining to relations between the northern and the southern regions, engender greater inclusion for women and youth, and indeed lay a credible foundation for lasting peace and prosperity in Yemen.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statement to no more than four minutes in order to enable to Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate those texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Ziade (Lebanon): Allow me to start by congratulating you, Madam President, and your team on the excellent work done during your presidency of the Council this month. I should also like to commend the members of the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg for their professionalism in steering the work of the Council during the exceedingly busy month of March.

Imagine an early morning of a spring day in Jerusalem — the soft breeze carrying the smell of thyme; the first sunshine thread bringing warmth; the knell of a church bell sounding in the distance, echoing the muezzin calling for prayer; quick steps on gravel of an early riser going to the temple; a city on the verge of resuming its bustling activities. That is what Jerusalem should sound like.

But today, the story is completely different there. The sounds are those of crashing rubble from houses in East Jerusalem being demolished by Israeli authorities; the voices are those of shouting soldiers and settlers, and the hurried steps are those of scared Palestinian children running away. Jerusalem, the holy city of the three monolithic religions, is becoming a city of one voice. Jerusalem is being denied its inclusive tradition by the inadmissible and illegal behaviour of settlers protected by Israeli forces, in particular in the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, where those shielded settlers are spreading fear and intimidation and Israeli forces are closing the gates and refusing access to worshippers.

How many letters of complaint must the Council receive for it to condemn these illegal activities and to compel Israel to abide by its obligations? Yes, it has obligations under the customs and rules of international law, under the Charter of the United Nations and under resolutions adopted by this body; obligations under article 4 of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, to refrain from any act of hostility directed against this holy site; obligations under article 38 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to respect people's religious convictions; its obligations under article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to respect a people's right to observe and practice their own religion.

How many of these provisions, treaties and norms should Israel be allowed to disregard before the Council reacts? The Israeli practices in Jerusalem are only part of a wider scheme to create new realities on the ground, making the two-State solution a more difficult objective to attain. Indeed, people are being segregated based on their national and religious identities and isolated in very restricted areas in an alarming reminder of apartheid.

Demolition, the confiscation of land, forced displacement and the authorization of illegal settlements are just a few examples of these Israeli practices. Indeed, on 28 March Israel demolished a two-storey building, followed by the demolition of European Union-funded humanitarian shelters in Jabal Al-Baba on 8 April to make room for new settlements. As if this were not enough, the decision authorizing settlers to move in to Al-Rajabi House in Hebron illustrates yet another expansion of this settlement policy.

As Council members know, Israel did not live up to its commitments to release the fourth batch of Palestinian prisoners. Moreover, nine months ago, while commending Mr. Kerry's efforts to relaunch the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis, we cautioned that Israeli persistence in its illegal settlements activities would hinder these efforts and jeopardize the negotiations. Today, the reaction of the Arab and Muslim world, the European Union and many other countries to these illegal settlement activities and policies is unanimous, and has culminated in a collective condemnation through the adoption of four resolutions by the Human Rights Council. Our challenge today remains to strengthen the resilience of the peace process and press for a just and comprehensive solution to all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in a rejection of partial solutions and in accordance with United Nations relevant resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the integral provisions of the Arab Peace Initiative.

Turning to my country, Lebanon, the Government of national interest has reiterated its respect for all United Nations resolutions and reaffirmed its commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and its call on the international community to help us to put an end to the Israeli violation of our sovereignty. Almost daily overflights and unilateral aggressive actions, such

as Israel's bombing of the houses of civilians in the south of Lebanon, not only exacerbate tensions but also undermine joint efforts of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon to fulfil their mandate under the said resolution.

My Government has also highlighted the following priorities: preserving the sovereignty of the State, ensuring the stability of the country, and guaranteeing its security. In this regard, I am proud to announce that the Lebanese Armed Forces have begun the successful implementation of security plans in Tripoli and the Bekaa, and to undertake measures to curb the threat of terrorist attacks.

Furthermore, the Government of Lebanon is determined to expedite the implementation of the road map established to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the Syrian crisis in the country, based on the assessment study prepared jointly with the World Bank. In the said report, the figures speak for themselves. Lebanon's gross domestic product shrank by $7.5 billion, while the cost to the Treasury was estimated at $5.1 billion, including $3.6 billion in expenses directly used to provide services for the Syrian refugees, and Treasury revenues dropped by $1.5 billion due to the decline in economic growth.

Today, the number of refugees fleeing Syria into Lebanon and registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has exceeded 1,034,000. As has been stated by Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

> "if the flow of people seeking safety in Lebanon continues, there could be over 1.6 million refugees in the country by the end of this year. But even now, Lebanon already has the highest per-capita concentration of refugees of any country in recent history, with nearly 230 registered Syrian refugees for every 1,000 Lebanese."

That is more than 140 times as many refugees per inhabitants as in your esteemed country, Madam President.

Every effort must be pursued to support my country facing such challenges. In this regard, Lebanon expresses its deep appreciation to the Government of France for hosting the International Support Group for Lebanon on 5 March, and commends the members of the Group for their unwavering commitment. Lebanon also looks forward to the Rome Conference on building up the capacities of the Lebanese Army, and considers the generous contribution of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to be the cornerstone in this endeavour. Furthermore, my country highly values the contributions made to the multi-donor trust fund. These are but the first seeds of financial assistance to respond to the dire need for greater aid to help the country cope with more than 1 million Syrian refugees. Lebanon calls for more generous contributions in this regard.

In addition, Lebanon has proposed measures to curb this existential threat through the provision of direct assistance to Government institutions, to honour the commitments made during the pledging conferences, to increase the number of refugees included in resettlement programmes based on the principle of burden-sharing, and, most importantly, to focus serious efforts on widening the humanitarian space to accommodate the Syrian refugees in safe camps inside Syria or in safe zones along the border.

More than three years into the conflict, Syria is now, in the words of the Secretary-General, the "biggest humanitarian and peace and security crisis facing the world" (*S/2014/208, para. 49*). These words translate the sufferings of the Syrian people — millions of internally displaced people and millions upon millions of refugees. Today, more than ever, the international community should overcome its inability to put an end to this raging conflict and to offer to the Syrian people their basic right to choose and live in dignity and peace by paving the way to a political process that will fulfil their aspirations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his important briefing this morning on developments in the Middle East, especially the peace prospects. I should like to affirm Egypt's support, despite all the difficulties and challenges it is facing.

I should also like to affirm our association with the statements to be made by the representatives of Iran in the name of the Non-Aligned Movement, Oman on behalf of the Group of Arab States, and Guinea on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Today, we meet again at a crossroads in the developments in the Middle East. Today is 29 April, the last day of the negotiations, launched under the

mediation of the Secretary of State of the United States, between the State of Palestine and Israel nine months ago to reach a final settlement. I should like at the outset to repeat Egypt's support for the efforts of the United States to reach a peaceful settlement based on the two-State solution of two States living side by side in peace within the borders of 4 June 1967, and with Al-Quds al-Sharif as the capital of the State of Palestine. Moreover, I should like to congratulate the State of Palestine on its recent adherence to the four Geneva Conventions and a number of other international human rights treaties, demonstrating the commitment of the State of Palestine to international law.

On this occasion, I should like to call on Israel to review its latest decision to freeze negotiations and impose additional sanctions on the Palestinian side, as if the occupation and its daily practices, as well as the construction of illegitimate settlements and the siege of Gaza, were not sufficient to exert pressure on Palestine, its Government and its people.

Events of the past three months reflect once again the same logic that has prevailed in the Middle East since the beginning of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. The Government of Israel continues to behave in contradiction to the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly and to violate the rules of international law, international humanitarian law, and conventions and accords previously reached with the Palestinian side and the United States mediator in the peace process. These violations include its refusal to release the fourth batch of refugees, its building of new settlements and expansion of existing settlements, its siege imposed on the city of Gaza, its prohibition of access of Palestinian Muslims to the Al-Aqsa Mosque; and its restrictions on Palestinian Christians seeking access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for the Easter ceremony in another attempt to overturn the status quo at the holy sites.

Of course, all those procedures have not safeguarded the security of Israeli as violations have persisted every day and Israel has continued to feel a lack of security, despite its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction and traditional weapons, which are of a higher quality than those in all other countries of the region.

Israel does all that yet expects the international community to support such acts or at least to remain silent. The Israeli Government has been very upset by the European Union guidelines on boycotting settlements and refusing to do business with institutions that support or fund settlement activities. It continues to try to encourage investment in Israel. We praise the international community and companies that have developed strategies to put an end to settlement activities. We confirm that the problem is related not to the State of Israel per se, but to the insistence of the current Israeli Government on pursuing its expansionist activities in the settlements in order to suppress the peace process or to delay any genuine peaceful settlement with the Palestinians. We therefore call on Israel once again to stop such acts and instead to resort to logic. We call on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and to put the pressure necessary to compel Israel to adhere to international law and its provisions and to cease its ongoing provocations in occupied lands, especially holy lands.

Moreover, Israel punishes the Palestinian Authority when it seeks to return to the peace process, work to unify the Palestinians, or adhere to international organizations and treaties. What kind of logic is that and how can peace be achieved from the Israeli viewpoint? Egypt supports the efforts towards Palestinian reconciliation and affirms that it will do its utmost to achieve a real consensus and peace process based on international legitimacy. Until then, Israel, as the occupying Power, must assume its full responsibility for the occupied territories and be aware that pointing its finger at other countries will deceive no one and or exempt it from accountability. The Security Council must take all necessary measures to ensure Israel's adherence to such commitments.

I now turn to the situation in Syria, where destruction and the killing of civilians is on the rise. Egypt supports the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States to find a political settlement. We call upon all parties, especially the Syrian Government, to take no decision that is not in line with the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex).

We affirm once again that current events in Syria cannot be used as a pretext for ignoring the importance of implementing relevant Security Council resolutions to put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan. We also express concern over the visits of senior Israeli officials to the occupied Golan during the past three months, as well as their provocative statements suggesting that the Golan is an integral part of Israel, in full disregard of relevant Security Council resolutions.

To conclude, I would like to congratulate Ms. Angela Kane and Ms. Sigrid Kaag on their diligence and earnest efforts to implement resolution 2118 (2013). I call upon the members of the Security Council, especially the permanent members, to implement paragraph 14 of resolution 687 (1991) on creating a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East without waiting for the next tragedy to occur.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Abdallah (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me first to congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. Let me also thank Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing. I should like to stress my delegation's support for the statements to be made later on behalf of the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement.

The current year, 2014, is a major landmark when it comes to the question of Palestine. It is a year of solidarity with the Palestinian people. That reaffirms the importance for the international community and the world's conscience in general to pay attention to the rights of the Palestinian people. However, Israel persists in its policies that run counter to the will of the international community. It is the very course that Israel has persistently taken for the past six decades.

Israel persists in its attempts to judaize the holy city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and to change its demographic characteristics. We have all witnessed Israel's settlement policies, its holding of thousands of detainees, its disrespect for holy sites, and its expulsion of Palestinian citizens, particularly from Al-Quds. We have witnessed its ongoing apartheid policy and policy of ethnic cleansing. All such violations run counter to international law and international humanitarian law and the most fundamental of human rights. All of those practices are taking place under the very nose of the Security Council without any attempt to put an end to them.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as a guardian of Islamic holy sites, strongly condemns the attacks and continuing acts of provocation in holy sites and attempts to prevent the faithful from reaching Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is tantamount to denying the fundamental right to worship. Israel is entirely responsible for the deterioration of the situation in East Jerusalem and for any negative consequences caused by the acts of the Israel Defence Forces or of settlers. We condemn all attempts to change the historical or religious nature of the various holy sites in the city. We call for an immediate end to all acts that lead to demographic changes in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, including the settlement campaign, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the collective expulsion of Palestinians, all of which contravenes international law.

Israel continues to challenge the will of the international community and all efforts to hold successful negotiations. It flouts all the agreements that surround the peace process, beginning with its refusal to release all the detainees it had agreed to release, extending settlement activities and changing the demographic nature of the city. As hopes for efforts to hold successful negotiations were raised over the past few months, the occupation forces were doing their utmost to undermine those efforts. For example, according Israeli Government statistics, the rate at which settlements were built increased by more than 23 per cent this year compared to last.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia welcomes the accession by Palestine to a number of international treaties, conventions and organizations, thereby demonstrating its respect for international law and its readiness to fulfil its obligations thereunder. It also shows that it respects international law as it seeks to fulfil the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, its freedom and right to self-determination. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also welcomes Palestinian reconciliation, which unifies Palestinian decision-making. The Palestinian Authority has thus reasserted its respect for all its international commitments.

It is truly ironic and bizarre that Israel should complain about such reconciliation when its own Foreign Minister is calling for ethnic cleansing and some members of its Cabinet have repeatedly expressed doubt about the two-State solution. In the past, Israel used the conflict between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority as a pretext not to cooperate; it is now using the pretext of agreement between the Palestinian factions to do the same thing. Those pretexts are empty. Israel hides behind them because it has no desire to see negotiations that would end the settlement and occupation succeed.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is committed to the Arab Peace Initiative set forth by the Kingdom itself. We call on the Security Council to compel the Israeli

Government to end to its acts of aggression, which run counter to international law, international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the resolutions of the Security Council on the occupied territories in Palestine, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Golan, including settlement activities in Al-Quds Al-Sharif and other occupied territories.

We call for the complete lifting of the siege against Gaza and for measures to ensure a boycott of all products coming from Israeli settlements. We call on the United Nations and the Secretary-General to make every effort to bring pressure to bear on Israel to release all Palestinian detainees in accordance with international law, international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and particularly to immediately release Palestinian children from Israeli prisons pursuant to resolution 1325 (2000) and other relevant resolutions. We call for the release of all Syrian detainees in Israeli prisons who are sons and daughters of the occupied Golan.

A few minutes ago, the Israeli representative launched a pathetic attack on my country, which shows how illogical the Israeli Government's position is when it comes to peace in the Middle East. It is turning right and left, throwing accusations to and fro, and attempting to divert the attention of the Council and the international community from its breaches of human rights and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territories; its treatment of detainees, peaceful demonstrators, women and children; its siege on Gaza; and numerous other violations that make the lives of Palestinians miserable and that suppress their rights.

The situation in Syria is the greatest humanitarian tragedy of this century. The situation continues to deteriorate as the Syrian authorities use any and all means in the war, including a policy of starvation and scorched earth. Homs and other parts of the country are besieged as indiscriminate artillery is used to force the people to their knees. Resolution 2139 (2014) calls on all parties to cease all attacks on civilian areas, as well as on the Old City of Homs, does it not? The Security Council has expressed its determination to take more steps in case of non-compliance with that resolution, has it not? Was the resolution not adopted two months ago, since when thousands upon thousands have been killed?

Now the Syrian authorities are violating resolution 2139 (2014) under our very noses, but the Council is unable to even agree on a simple statement condemning such acts? We call on the Council to take the necessary further measures in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2139 (2014), because the Syrian regime continues to flout that resolution. Furthermore, given the Syrian regime's continued use of chemical materials against its own people, we also call for the immediate, unreserved and unconditional lifting of the sieges of Homs, Aleppo and all other areas under siege in Syria.

My delegation has already warned of the Syrian Government's lack of responsiveness to the very bases on which the Geneva Conference on Syria was built. The agreement called for a transitional body with full authority to fulfil the aspirations and hopes of the Syrian people. Now the Syrian authorities are showing the international community that they do not care for the aspirations and hopes of their people by calling for so-called presidential elections. How can the parties in Syria meet in Geneva to set up a transitional Government while one of the parties is at the very same time calling for false elections to impose a fait accompli on the ground for an additional seven years. The insistence on holding presidential elections in the current situation is confirmation of the fact that the Syrian authorities will continue to suppress the aspirations of the Syrian people and to deprive them of self-determination.

The Security Council is unable to implement even those of its resolutions that were adopted unanimously. That truly undermines the credibility of the Security Council, any hope placed in the United Nations, and indeed any respect from world public opinion for United Nations resolutions and decisions. More importantly, over the past three years thousands upon thousands of Syrians have been subjected to barrel bombs and the worst forms of killing and torture, yet the regime enjoys full impunity. Those who do not take a stand against such acts are complicit in them.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Mukerji (India): Let me begin by expressing our appreciation to Nigeria for convening this quarterly open debate, which will allow the Council to take stock of recent developments in the Middle East, including the State of Palestine. I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his comprehensive briefing earlier today.

It is unfortunate that the negotiations between Israel and Palestine, which began in late July 2013 with the aim of reaching a deal within nine months, ended without any outcome. There is no doubt that the dialogue process generated hope as it came after a hiatus of more than two years in talks between the parties. We express regret that the parties failed to seize the opportunity presented by direct negotiations to strike a peace deal. It is a serious setback to the Middle East peace process. We hope that both sides will demonstrate the necessary political will to return to the negotiating table and that they will strike a mutually acceptable political solution to the crisis.

In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the plight of ordinary Palestinians is worsening every day due to roadblocks and the related infrastructure of occupation that put restrictions on the free movement of persons and goods. The blockade of Gaza is also continuing and adversely affecting humanitarian assistance services, economic activities and infrastructure development. It is also driving militant elements to vent their frustration through violence, thereby further complicating the situation on the ground and increasing Israel's vulnerability and security concerns. We firmly support a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue that would result in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel.

As a member of the Council in 2011 and 2012, India supported Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations, and continued our support as a co-sponsor of General Assembly resolution 67/19 in November 2012, which upgraded the status of Palestine to that of non-member observer State. The proclamation by the United Nations of 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was a positive step, and the Indian delegation fully supports the activities of the Council on the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to make this a meaningful year. India has always supported the nation-building efforts of Palestine through technical and economic assistance, including budgetary support. We are also implementing a series of development projects under the India-Brazil-South Africa Fund in Palestine.

Turning to Syria, the removal of almost 92 per cent of Syria's declared stockpile of chemical weapons out of Syria is a positive development. However, we regret the stalemate in the political process. We hope that both parties will resolve their differences and return to the third round of direct talks with strong political will and commitment. We also urge both sides to sincerely implement resolution 2139 (2014), ensuring humanitarian access, to immediately cease attacks against civilians, and to lift the siege of populated areas. Those measures, we believe, can go a long way towards alleviating the human suffering caused by the conflict that began some three years ago. Unilateral sanctions that adversely impact on the population of Syria must be lifted in order to alleviate humanitarian suffering.

Before I conclude, I would like to stress that there can be no military solution to this conflict. India fully supports a Syrian-led, inclusive political dialogue that resolves the current crisis and meets the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Some colleagues have insisted in their statements today on addressing the situation in my country under the agenda item "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". Although some countries have meant well while others did not, it is deeply saddening that none of the speakers has mentioned the terrorist attacks that took place in my country today, including in ancient city of Homs, where 36 people were killed and 85 injured, most of them children. That was just one incident among many. In the Al-Shaghour district of Damascus, a mortar attack on a school killed 24 children and injuring 86. These were just some of the children who lost their lives today while speakers spread false fears. I have provided the Council with photographs of some of the victims.

Once again, some delegations have insisted on delivering elaborate statements about the situation in my country, Syria, under the agenda item "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". Their misleading and provocative statements only contribute to extremism and terrorism in Syria and the region at large and district from the essence of the item, which is to find a way to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan. In that respect and in connection with the pictures that I distributed earlier, the armed terrorist forces that killed dozens in Damascus and Homs today are described by some colleagues as part of the

"moderate opposition", and those colleagues provide them with arms.

In that respect, I would like to point out that Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey and other Council members from the West contributed to that dubious approach by asking last month to convene two meetings on Syria in the General Assembly. The first coincided with the Security Council meeting devoted to the periodic briefing by the Secretariat on the situation in the Middle East (see S/PV.7118) and the second coincided with the meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. They thereby attempted to distract attention from the Palestinian question, under the item concerning the situation in the Middle East, and to play a negative role in the Syrian question.

That is clear evidence of their hypocrisy. Refusing to be a part of those outrageous attempts to silence our conversation today, which sould be chiefly devoted to putting an end to the Israeli occupation, once again I will not reply under that item to delegations that violate the Charter and the principles of international law by providing shelter to and supporting, arming and training terrorists and mercenaries; by facilitating their infiltration into Syria across its borders with neighbouring countries while spreading terrorism, destruction and extremism in my country; and through their earnest attempts to undermine any Syrian-led peaceful solution.

It is absurd that some delegations of States that do not even have a constitution or a parliament, and where women are deprived of their fundamental rights, should speak about the importance of establishing democracy in Syria, whose Vice-President is a woman. Some delegations that have become addicted to shedding Syrian blood over the past three years have been competing in calling for conferences, sessions and meetings to be held to spread misleading reports on the situation in Syria. Some have resorted to crying wolf today in a theatrical, amateurish and inaccurate manner about the situation of the Syrian people. Meanwhile, they have said not one word about putting an end to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan, as if reclaiming the Golan were not a right of the Syrian people and as if the Golan were not an occupied Syrian territory on which a number of resolutions are issued yearly calling upon Israel to withdraw from it to the borders of 4 June 1967.

With regard to Israeli settlements and the suffering of the Syrian people under occupation in the Golan for the past 50 years, why do those States not mention the heinous suppression and racial discrimination there, or the detention, torture and deprivation of natural resources, including oil, gas and water? A Syrian citizen under occupation in the Golan will not be treated in Israeli hospitals if he refuses to carry an Israeli identification card. He cannot study in schools in Arabic, in accordance with the Syrian curriculum, if he does not hold an Israeli identification card. Education in Arabic, be it according to the Syrian or any other curriculum, is prohibited there. In addition, the Isreali occupation forces do not allow the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to work in the occupied Golan or to establish clinics and hospitals there, pursuant to the resolutions of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which dates back to 1919. Moreover, the occupation forces have built a racist segregation wall east of the Syrian village of Majdal Shams and refused to provide international organizations with maps of the landmines they planted in the Golan, which have killed more than 726 Syrian citizens, including 227 children.

Israel's assistance and support to terrorist groups, including those affiliated with the Al-Qaeda in the disengagement area in the occupied Syrian Golan, are a flagrant violation of resolution 350 (1974), the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, and international law. Israel has gone so far as to build a field hospital near the separation line in the Golan. Its Prime Minister visited injured terrorists treated in Israeli hospitals and insisted on their return to the separation line in the occupied Syrian Golan to continue their terrorist activities there. Israeli assistance to terrorists endangers the lives of United Nations staff working there and undermines their effectiveness. These are members of the so-called moderate opposition, as I said earlier. Those terrorist organizations have repeatedly abducted peacekeepers, including the Filipino batallion. We have sent reports about it to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations with all the details, and called for official investigations in that regard. However, to date the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has provided us with no results of such investigations, assuming they have even carried them out in the first place.

Israel has not only provided logistical support to terrorists, but it has directly interfered with military forces more than once. For example, last month, it shelled a school and a mosque in the village of

Al-Hamidiyah in the occupied Syrian Golan, in flagrant violation of international law, which exposes once again the coordination between the Israeli occupation forces and terrorist groups, just like that arranged by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. There is a clear alliance between those three countries, on the one hand, and Israel on the other, all of which are cooperating with several terrorist groups in an attempt to destroy Syria, shed the blood of its people and suppress the prospects of establishing an independent Palestinian State. A colleague who spoke before me described my country as a brotherly country; he is a liar, because we in Syria do not want that alleged fraternity; we do not want him or his regime, which sheds the blood of our people. We do not want a terrorist, criminal fraternity.

We should not deceive ourselves or the world. Everybody knows for sure that Israel, an occupying Power that is based on occupation and expansion, has never been concerned with peace. It occupied the Syrian Golan and Jerusalem. It has encroached upon various countries of the region relentlessly violated international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and attacked the holy sites of Muslims and Christians alike. Now it is trying to usurp the Al-Aqsa Mosque in an attempt to establish a Jewish State of Israel, to drain Palestine of its population and to put an end to the right of return. It manipulates peace negotiations and initiatives under the pretext of so-called security concern in order to devote its efforts to occupation and to overturning a status quo that cannot be changed. How can Israel speak about peace after all that? How can it evoke peace when it engages in all those practices that undermine the basic principles of peace? Is it not insolent for Israel to claim that the removal of any settlement is a painful matter that it cannot tolerate, while the persecution of the whole people of Palestine is acceptable?

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): We thank Special Coordinator Mr. Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

We meet here as ominous developments have taken place in the Middle East. The atmosphere has once again become toxic. Israel has halted peace talks. Apparently, that ends United States Secretary of State John Kerry's nine-month peace initiative. Israel is pondering economic sanctions against Palestine. That would definitely worsen the economic plight of the Palestinian people. Palestine has announced that it is considering all options to respond to the Israeli decision to sever contact for talks. Palestinians have decided to give priority to reconciliation and national unity. This hiatus should not be treated as irreversible or a point of no return. It should be seen as a pause and a time for introspection. Talks, we would like to believe, are halted, not abandoned.

We welcome the Palestinian initiative to forge national unity. The talks between Palestine and Israel are also a priority because without the peace process there will be no lasting peace and stability. We agree with Secretary Kerry's conclusion that leaders have to make the compromises to forge ahead. The difficult issues of final border arrangements, settlements and release of prisoners will not be resolved away from the negotiating table. That is the inexorable logic of the two-State solution.

Pakistan calls for urgent steps to resuscitate and renew the stalled peace talks. The considerable time and political capital invested in the process should not be frittered away. The cost of failure is huge. The flare-up in Gaza last month and again last week gave a glimpse of what a complete break-down might lead to. That said, dialogue for the sake of dialogue, without the political will and commitment to make difficult choices, is neither desirable nor conducive to peace in the region.

Pakistan condemns the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound by Israeli extremists. The annexation of Palestinian lands by the Israeli occupation forces is illegal. The debate in the Israeli Knesset on annexing Al-Haram Al-Sharif and provocative actions, such as the disruption of Easter celebrations, undermine peace, heighten tensions and further destabilize the region.

Pakistan supports continued supervision by the Islamic Waqf of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem, with a special role assigned to Jordan. We call for a moratorium on settlements, the release of detainees, a recommitment to meaningful and substantive dialogue, and the lifting of the blockade in Gaza. It is important that tensions be reduced and that minimal trust be built for the early resumption of talks.

Peace, security, stability and sustainable economic development in the Middle East depend directly on the creation of an independent, viable and contiguous State of Palestine, based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side with Israel,

and with both sides recognizing each other's legitimate rights. Israel must also withdraw from all Arab territories, including Lebanon and the Syrian Golan.

Let me now turn to Syria. We welcome the progress made so far in removing and destroying chemical weapons in Syria and appreciate the cooperation extended by the Syrian Government to the joint mission of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We back Ms. Sigrid Kaag's call for the removal of all chemical weapons from Syria. While we share her concern over reports about the use of chlorine gas as a weapon, the best course of action is to investigate the reports about the use of toxic chemicals to establish the facts beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Let us not forget that every day conventional weapons cause far more casualties than chemical weapons. Killings are increasing and the number of refugees and displaced persons is going up. The Secretary-General has informed us that combatants in Syria are not heeding this body's decision to give humanitarian aid unfettered access. As a result, some 300,000 Syrians trapped in conflict zones continue to be deprived of basic food and medicine. Worst of all, the Geneva talks are in a state of limbo.

We call on all parties to the conflict in Syria, and on nations that have special relations with them, to come back to the negotiating table to find a long-term political solution that respects the aspirations of all Syrians. We also call on the parties to honour the decisions taken by the Council in its resolution 2139 (2014) on humanitarian access. Syria should not be pushed to the back burner because of other pressing issues.

Finally, we condemn terrorist attacks in Syria, including those that took place today. We offer our deepest condolences to the people and families of the victims in Syria.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. I also thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his briefing, and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

The nine-month deadline for signing a final status agreement between Israelis and Palestinians expires today, 29 April. In the absence of any progress, and despite wide international support of the commendable efforts of the United States, the realization of a two-State solution seems increasingly elusive. We are all losers in this situation. The disappointment of those who have engaged in the process in good faith is understandable. Failing to deal with the fundamental aspects of the question of Palestine in the present will only create greater challenges for the future.

Brazil notes with disappointment that Israel has not fulfilled its previous undertaking to release a final group of Palestinian prisoners. The continuation of the settlement campaign in the occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, is particularly harmful. We reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and detrimental to the peace process. They undermine the prospects for a negotiated solution to the conflict and seriously threaten the viability of a two-State solution. We also strongly condemn the acts of violence against Israeli civilians and rockets launched from Gaza into Israel, which are contrary to the cause of peace, erode confidence and generate more violence and distrust.

We welcome recent efforts to achieve intra-Palestinian unity, which is key to consolidating a democratic and sustainable Palestinian State, and we call on all parties to fully commit to the obligations assumed by Palestine. Due to the current state of paralysis in the negotiation process, no one can blame the State of Palestine for advancing its legitimate rights in multilateral forums.

At a time when collective responsibility more necessary than ever, the international community risks also being rightly accused of omission in the case of Palestine. No early-warning conflict-prevention mechanism is needed to notice the Palestinians' appeal for the Security Council's attention. The Council should take on a more proactive role and consider establishing basic parameters for the negotiations that are consistent with the extensive corpus of United Nations resolutions. In so doing it would strengthen respect for international law and exercise its authority and functions, as laid down in the Charter of the United Nations. On the occasion of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we call on the interested parties committed to a two-State solution, particularly civil society, to join their efforts in trying to influence the leadership on both sides to shoulder

their responsibilities in constructing an environment conducive to peace in the Middle East.

Turning to Syria, Brazil is deeply troubled by the scale of the destruction and indifference to human suffering. It is a grave mistake to assume that in the absence of a political solution the crisis should be resolved by using force. During the second Geneva Conference on Syria in January, Brazil called for an immediate end to the provision of weapons to all parties in Syria, among several measures. The continued militarization of the conflict only brings about more violence, instability and suffering. Today the number of internally displaced persons amounts to nearly one-fourth of Syria's residents. Approximately 15 per cent of Syria's total population are now refugees, not to mention the shocking number of fatal victims of the conflict.

Disputes on other international fronts should not contaminate the common goal of attaining peace and promoting a Syrian-led political process. The immediate and full implementation of the Geneva final communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/523, annex) by all parties remains the most important goal, and we urge them to demonstrate a strong political will and firm commitment to that process. Brazil continues to support all efforts to resume contacts between the parties. National dialogue and reconciliation are key to ensuring that the elections in Syria will fully conform with the provisions of the final communiqué. Violations of human rights by both sides, consistently denounced by the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, should be roundly condemned.

Also in line with the Commission's reports, we reiterate our concern about the negative impact of unilateral sanctions on the living conditions of the Syrian people. The increasingly radical nature of some opposition armed groups, and the spillover effects in neighbouring countries, especially Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey, are also a matter for concern. Brazil reiterates its call for full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all those affected by violence in Syria, without politicization, as prescribed by resolution 2139 (2014). The Government of Syria bears the greatest responsibility in this regard, although the armed opposition must equally and fully comply with its humanitarian obligations. Invoking a humanitarian crisis to justify militarization can only intensify the suffering of the civilian population, especially its most vulnerable segments, and increase human rights violations.

I would like to say a few words on Lebanon, to which Brazil is united by historical and cultural ties. Brazil remains extremely concerned about the increased instability in Lebanon, whose people have lately been victims of a series of terrorist acts, a particularly perverse development given Lebanon's generosity in hosting a million Syrian refugees. We welcome the formation of a new Government, which, we are confident, will be able to shield the country from further instability and strengthen its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We also call on the international community to keep up its support for Lebanon's State institutions, including the army, and we reaffirm our strong support for Lebanon's dissociation from the Syrian conflict, as set out in the Baabda Declaration. We urge all Lebanese political actors to avoid further escalation and to embrace the path of understanding. In that regard, Brazil fully supports the legal conduct of presidential elections, as enshrined in the Lebanese Constitution, and urges all parties to cooperate in ensuring the success of the electoral process.

Finally, Brazil reiterates its support for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), whose maritime task force has been led by a Brazilian commander since February 2011. UNIFIL has been instrumental in promoting stability in Lebanon and in preserving security along the border between Lebanon and Israel.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vrailas (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The candidate country Montenegro; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

To save time, I will deliver a shortened version of my statement. The full text is being circulated in the Chamber and will be posted on our website.

The European Union is extremely concerned over recent developments related to the peace process that are putting into question the continued negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians beyond the original deadline of 29 April. The European Union reiterates

its full support for the peace efforts brokered by the United States of America, and calls on both parties to remain focused on negotiations and the unprecedented benefits that peace can bring. Negotiations are the best way forward. The extensive efforts deployed in recent months must not go to waste. We call on all sides to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid any action that may further undermine peace efforts and the viability of a two-State solution.

The European Union has consistently supported intra-Palestinian reconciliation, but on clear and certain terms. We reiterate that such reconciliation should take place behind President Abbas and in line with the principles set out in his speech of 4 May 2011. The European Union expects any new Government to uphold the principle of non-violence and to remain committed to achieving a two-State solution and a negotiated, peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to accepting previous agreements and obligations, including Israel's legitimate right to exist. Reconciliation on those terms is an important element for the unity of a future Palestinian State and for reaching a two-State solution and a lasting peace.

The European Union welcomes the prospect of genuine democratic elections for all Palestinians. The fact that President Abbas will remain fully in charge of the negotiation process and have a mandate to negotiate in the name of all Palestinians provides further assurance that the peace negotiations can and must proceed.

The European Union is convinced that there can only be a political solution to the conflict in Syria. The regime's constant obstruction led to the failure of the first two first rounds of the Geneva negotiations, which need to be resumed without delay. We call on the Syrian regime to accept the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) and to show a clear commitment to the negotiation agenda and the method of work, in particular treating in parallel the issues of terrorism and transition. We recall that the opposition delegation, led by the Syrian National Coalition, has already accepted those conditions.

The European Union deeply regrets the declaration by the Syrian regime that it will organize presidential elections on 3 June. Any election in Syria should take place only within the framework of the Geneva communiqué of 2012. Elections organized by the regime outside that framework would be a parody of democracy, have no credibility whatsoever and undermine efforts to reach a political solution.

The European Union is gravely concerned about the disastrous and deteriorating human rights situation in Syria and strongly condemns all violations and abuses of human rights, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The European Union calls on the Security Council to urgently address the prevailing culture of impunity and refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

The European Union deplores the lack of progress on the implementation of resolution 2139 (2014). We call on all parties to comply with the resolution immediately and without further delay. The continued withholding of consent to basic relief operations, across borders and across the lines of conflict, is arbitrary and unjustified. The European Union calls upon the Security Council to take further measures if non-compliance continues.

The European Union reiterates the call on the Syrian regime to fulfil its obligations to have its chemical weapons arsenal, including production facilities, destroyed by the end of June. All outstanding questions surrounding Syria's declaration must be addressed. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Rif Damascus on 21 August 2013 must be held accountable.

The European Union is deeply concerned about recent media reports alleging the use of chlorine gas against the Syrian population. Any use of a toxic chemical for purposes other than those explicitly permitted under the Chemical Weapons Convention constitutes a violation of article I of the Convention. The perpetrators of any such breach must be held accountable.

The European Union commends once again those neighbouring countries, notably Lebanon and Jordan, that continue to keep their borders open and provide safe haven for refugees from Syria, including Palestinians. We will continue to support them. The European Union is committed to the unity, stability, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and reiterates its continued commitment to contributing to meeting Lebanon's growing needs. We welcome all such efforts of the international community, including the International Support Group for Lebanon, in which the European Union and some of its member States play an active role. We also welcome the formation of the new Government, led by Prime Minister Salam,

and encourage it to act without delay in tackling the existing challenges for Lebanon.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Boukadoum (Algeria): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the central issue concerning the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

I would like also to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his comprehensive briefing. My delegation obviously aligns itself with the statements to be made on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Algeria regrets that all serious and credible efforts exerted recently to salvage the prospects of a peaceful, just and lasting solution, especially those engaged by the United States of America, have been challenged and undermined. Israel's continued unlawful actions on the ground provide the starkest evidence of the contrast between its deeds and its professed intention to participate in a peace process. They clearly demonstrate that the occupying Power is not on the path of peace and that the only goal it pursues is to set aside any future prospects for a peaceful settlement through a wide range of activities carried out daily with the aim of altering the demographic composition and cultural character of the Palestinian territory.

In that regard, Algeria rejects and condemns the continuing policy of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and reaffirms that those activities remain the major obstacle to peace and impair all efforts and negotiations to achieve the two-State solution. We also recall that the occupying Power continues its illegal and inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip with disregard for international humanitarian law and all resolutions, especially resolution 1860 (2009). Similarly, we continue to register numerous acts of provocation and incitement by Israeli extremists and officials in occupied East Jerusalem, particularly at Al-Aqsa Mosque, which are aggravating tensions and religious sensibilities.

Algeria welcomed and supported the conclusion of the reconciliation agreement between our Palestinian brothers, which is an important step towards the fulfillment of the Palestinian aspirations. Unity in the Palestinian ranks is a positive and necessary step for peace. It should be perceived as so by all parties. Algeria congratulates the Palestinian Government on the recent accession by the State of Palestine to several international conventions. Those steps will undoubtedly go a long way towards consolidating the wide support gained through General Assembly resolution 67/19, which accorded the status of non-member observer State to Palestine. While reaffirming the important significance of that political achievement for the Palestinian people and for the Government of the State of Palestine, Algeria expresses its full support for the enhancement of Palestine's status to ensure its rightful place among the international community, including by its admission to full membership of the United Nations.

Almost 67 years have passed since the adoption in 1947 of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), providing for the establishment of two States, and more than 25 years since the proclamation of the State of Palestine in Algiers in 1988. Yet, the Palestinian people are still pursuing their homeland and still yearning to achieve their inalienable right to self-determination. The international community must exert all efforts to compel Israel to abide by its obligations and commitments in order to achieve the two-State solution on the basis of the core principles of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid terms of reference, and especially the principle of exchanging land for peace.

Algeria expresses its hope for genuine and rapid progress to be renewed during the current International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to resolve all final status issues, in particular the central issue of occupation, which remains the source of the problem and the core of the problem of the entire Middle East. It is our firm conviction that peace cannot be achieved in the Middle East without the international community, in particular the Security Council, taking a firm and courageous stand to end the occupation of Palestinian land and all Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and to allow the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and establish an independent State within the 1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): At the outset, allow me to express our sincere congratulations to the Nigerian

presidency for successfully leading the Council's work in April, and to convey my delegation's best wishes to the Republic of Korea for its upcoming presidency.

Turkey has supported all efforts towards a lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, comprising two States living side-by-side in peace and security, based on the pre-1967 borders, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Today was meant to mark the deadline for the conclusion of the peace talks launched between Israel and Palestine in July last year. Unfortunately, one of the parties decided to suspend the talks last week. We deeply regret that decision. Turkey is of the view that the peace process and the Palestinian reconciliation efforts are not mutually exclusive and should not be presented as such. That view is also mentioned recurrently in various United Nations reports. Indeed, the need for Palestinian unity has been a reality since the division in 2007 and, if well guided and supported, such unity would help lay the groundwork for sustainable and lasting peace in the region. With that understanding, Turkey welcomed the agreement reached between Fatah and Hamas and the decision to form a unity Government that will embrace all Palestinians.

As a matter of fact, it is hard to describe the political environment within which the peace talks were held as conducive. The Israeli side did not live up to its commitments to release the fourth batch of pre-Oslo Palestinian prisoners, and it continued its illegal settlement and demolition activities and its violation of the basic rights of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Settler violence, provocations against religious and holy sites, including Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and attempts to meddle with the status of Jerusalem intensified. The embargo imposed against Gaza remained in force and the construction of the separation wall, in defiance of international law and Security Council resolutions, continued.

The international community has a responsibility to take all the necessary steps to end the humanitarian crisis in Palestine. Turkey, for its part, continues to help alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people through bilateral projects in several parts of Palestine, including the Gaza Strip. Last year, we delivered urgent aid, including generators, fuel, flour and medicine, to Gaza. In addition to our ongoing project to build a hospital, the Turkish Government recently allocated another $1.5 million to a World Health Organization project aimed at providing further support to the health system in Gaza. However, long-term solutions are urgently needed to avoid greater humanitarian risks. Only a comprehensive and just settlement abolishing these restrictions will enable the robust and sustainable development of the Palestinian economy. We therefore call once again for the immediate lifting of the embargo against Gaza in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009) and the ceasefire commitments of November 2012.

The year 2014 has been proclaimed by the General Assembly as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This should be a year for all of us to mobilize our means and capabilities to support Palestine in the economic and political realms. A politically and economically strong Palestine will surely be a stronger partner for Israel and the entire neighbourhood for years to come. Turkey supports the inalienable right of the State of Palestine to fully enjoy the privileges of statehood, including becoming a Member of the United Nations and other international organizations and joining international treaties.

The Syrian regime missed yet another deadline to eliminate its declared chemical weapons before 27 April. Turkey is also deeply concerned about the reports concerning the regime's recent chlorine gas attacks on civilian populations. We welcome the decision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to send a mission to Syria to investigate those incidents. If the allegations are true, they constitute a violation of the regime's commitments.

The humanitarian situation in Syria, on the other hand, is deteriorating every day due to the increasing number of people in need of urgent assistance and the regime's continued arbitrary denial of access. The provisions of resolution 2139 (2014) are very clear on stopping violence against civilians, putting an end to sieges and allowing rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and cross-border humanitarian operations via the most direct routes. Using the issue of humanitarian access as a bargaining chip cannot be tolerated. The regime's policy of deliberately minimizing the number of access points into Syria is a violation of resolution 2139 (2014), and imposing such preconditions is unacceptable. The United Nations should therefore find ways and means to provide humanitarian assistance through a greater number of border gates, in order to ensure access to a larger population.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Turkey has spared no effort to alleviate the suffering of our Syrian neighbours, consistently maintained an open-door policy, facilitated zero-point humanitarian assistance and responsibly provided for the needs of the Syrians who sought shelter in the 22 camps in Turkey and in various Turkish cities. As of April, the number of Syrians in Turkey is fast approaching 1 million. Unfortunately, neither Turkey's nor Syria's other neighbours' resources are limitless. What we expect from our partners is an active engagement and meaningful contribution in shouldering this burden.

The Syrian regime, which clearly displayed reluctance to discuss the political transition in Geneva, once again revealed its lack of sincerity when it comes to finding a political solution to the crisis, with the announcement of the so-called presidential elections in June. Such elections, which will apparently be organized under conditions whereby nearly half of the population is displaced, some still under indiscriminate attacks by the forces of the regime, will not only be null and void, but also be in flagrant contravention of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) and will constitute another blow to efforts to find a political solution to the crisis. The way ahead towards a solution to crisis is clearly set out in the communiqué, that is, the immediate establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive powers.

Peace and security in the Middle East are not unattainable goals, as long as there is strong political resolve. In that sense, we call on the leaders of Israel and the State of Palestine to overcome the hurdles and get back to the negotiating table with a genuine desire to put an end to the decades-long search for peace.

I would like to assure you, Mr. President, that Turkey's strong commitment to peace and security in its region will continue until we reach that goal and that Turkey will never shy away from its responsibilities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you, Sir, for having convened today's meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing. I am also grateful to Ambassador Mansour, the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, and Ambassador Prosor, Permanent Representative of Israel, for their statements.

Today, I will touch on two issues: first, the Middle East peace process and, secondly, the situation in Syria.

On the Middle East peace process, Japan has been following recent developments with concern. We would like to call on Israel and Palestine not to take any unilateral actions that might negatively affect the peace process. Japan reiterates its full support for the United States mediation efforts and strongly requests both parties to continue the peace negotiations persistently. It is also important for the international community to foster a proper environment that would allow both parties to continue their talks.

Originally, today I would have liked to give the Council a detailed update on two Japanese initiatives aimed at mobilizing private sector investment in Palestine, had both parties agreed to an extension of their direct talks. The first initiative is a project called the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity. Its flagship project, the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park, is scheduled to start operations this summer. The second is the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development. At the second ministerial meeting of the Conference, held in Jakarta on 1 March, Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida pledged a total of $200 million for Palestinian assistance. As part of that pledge, an aid package in the amount of $62 million was already disbursed last month. Synergy effects between the Japanese initiatives and the initiative for the Palestinian economy announced on 24 April by United States Secretary of State Kerry could result in enormous gains. I would like to further elaborate on those initiatives at an appropriate occasion in the future.

Turning to the situation in Syria, we are deeply concerned that no substantial improvements have been witnessed on the humanitarian situation, even after the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2139 (2014) in February. Japan demands that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, immediately cease all attacks against civilians in accordance with the resolution. They must also ensure immediate, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas affected by the conflict. Japan pledged an additional $120 million for humanitarian assistance at the conference held in Kuwait on 15 January. The entire amount has been disbursed. That has brought our total humanitarian assistance to $275 million.

Regarding the political process, unfortunately, there is no concrete prospect for the resumption of the second Geneva Conference on Syria. The Syrian

Government's refusal of Ambassador Brahimi's proposal to hold parallel discussions on both terrorism and the transitional governing body has made it even harder to overcome the current impasse. The Speaker of the Syrian Parliament recently announced that presidential elections will take place on 3 June. In that regard, I would like to recall that both the Secretary-General and Ambassador Brahimi have repeatedly warned that the holding of elections under the current circumstances would damage the political process. Japan strongly urges both the Syrian Government and the opposition parties to come back to Geneva with the political will to achieve a political transition in accordance with the Geneva communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/522, annex).

As for the chemical weapons, about 8 per cent of the chemicals still remain in Syria. They should be removed swiftly in order to achieve the target of eliminating the Syrian chemical weapon programme by the end of the June. The Syrian Government must intensify its efforts to expeditiously meet its elimination obligations set by resolution 2118 (2013) and the relevant decisions by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We, for our part, have disbursed a total of $18 million to the trust funds established under the OPCW and the United Nations. Japan would like to renew its commitment to providing the greatest possible cooperation in that regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Oman.

Mr. Al-Hajri (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a pleasure to address the Security Council on behalf of the Arab Group and to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. Your diplomatic skills and knowledge of international affairs are, we are sure, the best guarantee for achieving success in the Council's deliberations and the desired results.

The Security Council is meeting today to debate a most important issue on its agenda, namely, the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, to which we have long awaited a solution from the international community. We all know that Palestinian lands are languishing under Israeli occupation, and have been for a long time. The situation is deteriorating on a daily basis owing to the arbitrary practices of the occupying Power.

The Arab Group expresses its utmost concern with respect to the continuing Israeli siege and its intensified campaigns and inhumane, illegal and violent attacks aimed changing the demographic composition of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and other cities in Palestinian territory by withholding identity cards, the forced expulsion of inhabitants, the building of settlements and the intensification of settlement activity, and attacks against Muslim and Christian holy sites.

The Arab Group condemns the continuing incursions by the Israeli occupation forces and settlers into the mosque. Such provocative acts by the Israelis and the gross violations of Muslim and Christian holy sites make it the duty of the international community as a whole to immediately intervene to put an end to such crimes, because the desecration of holy sites is a threat to the peace and stability of the region and the world. We call on the international community, in particular on the occasion of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to join that people, who are fighting to regain their inalienable rights. The international community must bring pressure to bear on Israel to free all Palestinian prisoners and detainees, as well as those from the occupied Syrian Golan in Israeli prisons.

The Security Council is called upon now more than ever to fulfil its responsibilities to maintain international peace and security, resolve the crisis in the Middle East in accordance with the Charter and the principles of international law. It should do so by taking urgent measures, compelling Israel to immediately put an end to such provocations of religious sensitivities and by condemning State terrorism against civilians, which is a threat to peace and security in the region.

The Arab Group realizes that the United Nations has adopted many resolutions that have been ignored by the occupying Power. The time has come for the occupying Power to abide by Council resolutions and to put an end to its illegitimate occupation. If Israel persists, that would constitute a threat to the Council's legitimacy and a sign of its inability to maintain international peace and security.

The Arab Group stresses that the annexation by Israeli occupation forces of Palestinian land and the Syrian Golan is a grave threat to international peace and security. It is a source of major outrage and anger in the region. It cannot be condoned.

We cannot fail to welcome the agreement on Palestinian reconciliation. It will unify the Palestinian will to face the major challenges on the question of Palestine. We call on all international parties, including the Council, to provide all the necessary support for Palestinian national reconciliation to succeed. Do not place obstacles before it. We condemn the continuing Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty by land, sea and air and the electronic war being waged by Israel against Lebanon through espionage activities along the borders with occupied Palestine. Such data is being used for piracy and spying on Lebanese telecommunication networks. We call on the international community to fulfil its duties in accordance with the Charter to achieve international peace and security.

With respect to the Syrian crisis, the Arab Group continues to stress the need to resolve the crisis by peaceful means, through a process based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex) and within the framework of the efforts being undertaken by Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States. We call on the international community as represented in the Security Council to continue to make efforts to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people. In his latest report, the Joint Special Representative informs us that the number of refugees outside Syrian borders will reach 4 million by the end of this year if the crisis were to continue. The number of victims in the next two years may well reach 350,000. There is no alternative to a peaceful political settlement of the crisis. The Group appeals to the international community to make more immediate efforts to stop the war machine in Syria, protect civilians and facilitate the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance to those who need it.

The aspirations of the Palestinian people have always been addressed to this international body so that they may be protected from the inhuman, illegal and arbitrary practices of successive Israeli Governments. Therefore, the Security Council, in the context of the Year of International Solidarity with the Palestinian People, must compel Israel to cease and desist in those policies that destroy any peace process that would lead to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We call on it to accept the Arab Peace Initiative and begin true negotiations in order to achieve peace based on the Initiative and resolutions of the Security Council.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his comprehensive briefing on the latest developments in the Middle East, particularly with regard to the question of Palestine.

The Security Council is meeting at a time when peace negotiations have unfortunately reached a dead end, following intensive efforts by the United States Administration and the personal efforts of Secretary of State Kerry. My country's position has always been to support the United States initiative in favour of negotiations and a time-bound settlement. That position remains firm and is based on the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative and the tenets of a two-State solution respecting the 1967 borders.

The Kingdom of Morocco, a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and of the League of Arab States, calls on the international community to fully shoulder its responsibilities with respect to the deterioration of the situation involving the Islamic holy sites in occupied Palestine and the attempt to change the demographic composition of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. His Highness the King of Morocco presided over the Al-Quds Committee this month in the presence of President Abbas and made an appeal to the international community to fully shoulder its responsibilities. His Highness said, "the protection of Al-Quds is the core of the question of Palestine. East Jerusalem must be the capital of Palestine." He called for a genuine Palestinian national reconciliation led by the Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas. He expressed the wish for that reconciliation to be positive and that it protect the highest interests of the Palestinian people, particularly through the establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace with Israel.

Following national reconciliation, the Palestinians are now on the right road. We express our sincere congratulations on that reconciliation because it unifies Palestinian decision-making and strengthens the Palestinian position in peacemaking, efforts towards the two-State solution, and international legitimacy towards a peaceful and lasting settlement and the establishment of a State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. There are many hopes being pinned on the negotiations being undertaken by Secretary of State Kerry in an effort to achieve peace. We ask that

all obstacles be overcome and that all commitments be fulfilled without blackmail.

With regard to Syria, now that three years have gone by, the situation continues to deteriorate. Lives are being wasted and the country is being destroyed. In accordance with the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2014/295), the number of victims has escalated and more than 6.5 million are displaced inside the country and 2.6 million are refugees outside the country. They require much help and humanitarian assistance. The parties must respect resolution 2139 (2014), on humanitarian assistance.

The Kingdom of Morocco has set up a field hospital in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, pursuant to our promise made at the pledging conference. We call on both sides to put an end to the conflict by seeking peaceful solutions to it. We stress the unity and territorial integrity of Syria. We joined in the second Geneva Conference, which we believe is the starting point for a political settlement, as agreed by the entire international community.

To conclude, let me also stress our commitment to the independence and territorial integrity of Lebanon, which must be maintained.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM). At the outset, I would like to convey the Movement's appreciation to the delegation of Nigeria for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, and for its skilled leadership of the Security Council this month. I also wish to express our appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing to the Council today.

Since our last debate on this matter (see S/PV.7140), regrettably, little progress has been made towards the long-overdue realization of a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, which has been on the United Nations agenda for more than 66 years. Despite serious international efforts and constant, repeated calls for a peaceful and comprehensive solution in conformity with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands remains ongoing, and the Palestinian people continue to be tragically denied their inalienable rights and freedom. Furthermore, the peace process is once again at a dangerous impasse, with negotiations suspended due to Israel's repeated rejectionist stance.

The failure to resolve the question and the prolongation of the conflict, despite the clarity of international law, including the demands made by the Security Council, continue to damage the credibility of our international system, undermine the rule of law and compound conflict and human suffering.

In this year 2014, a year proclaimed by the General Assembly as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Non-Aligned Movement calls for the redoubling of international efforts to actively support and advance a peaceful, just and lasting solution based on the long-standing parameters rooted in the relevant United Nations resolutions and initiatives. In that connection, NAM welcomes the affirmed readiness of the State of Palestine to uphold its international responsibilities and obligations in accordance with the multilateral treaties to which it has recently acceded. We stress the importance of respect for the rule of law in any effort to achieve peace and justice. NAM also welcomes the recent steps towards Palestinian reconciliation, and we emphasize that unity is imperative for the realization of the Palestinian people's legitimate national aspirations.

At this crucial stage, NAM implores the Security Council to act forthwith to uphold its Charter duties for the maintenance of international peace and security by tangibly contributing to a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict — the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict — which remains a source of grave concern for the region and international community as a whole and for the prospects of global peace and stability. The Security Council cannot remain on the sidelines while the situation continues to deteriorate and the chances for a peace based on a two-State solution and in accordance with the pre-1967 borders are being sabotaged by the intransigent refusal of Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by international law, including humanitarian and human rights law.

In the recent period, the Movement has remained greatly concerned, specifically about the illegal policy being pursued by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people, their land and their holy sites, about the negative impact on the ground and about the peace negotiations. Despite the international efforts and calls for peace, Israel has continued to behave in

a manner blatantly contradictory to the law and the clear objectives of the peace process. Every aggressive and provocative action taken on the ground by Israel in violation of international law and the human rights of the Palestinian people has undermined the goal of resolving the core issues — the Palestine refugee question, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, security, water and prisoners — and finally achieving a peaceful settlement of the conflict in all its aspects.

As a result, tensions have continued to rise, and the gap between the hopes and expectations for the political process and the reality on the ground remains vast. An overview of just the recent period, including as reflected in official communications conveyed to the Security Council, reveals that, rather than negotiating in good faith and abiding by its legal obligations, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, Israel has in fact intensified all of its illegal activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly its illegal settlement colonization campaign, which is destroying the contiguity of the Palestinian land and threatening the two-State solution.

Israel's illegal actions have included the continuation and escalation of settlement construction, the construction of the wall, the confiscation of land, the demolition of homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, military raids resulting in the killing and injury of civilians, the arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, violence and terror by extremist Israeli settlers and religious fanatics and the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip. Those violations have worsened conditions on the ground and cast serious doubts regarding Israel's intentions and claimed commitment to a just peace, based on the two-State solution and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

NAM is especially alarmed by the increasing acts of aggression in occupied East Jerusalem, especially in and around Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, that have resulted from provocations by Israeli extremists. The blatant disrespect for that holy site and its worshippers and the continued threats of further incursions are grave acts of incitement that are aggravating religious sensitivities and already high tensions. Israeli Government officials continue to recklessly fuel such tensions by encouraging extremists to acts of provocation that threaten to ignite a religious conflict, which would have far-reaching consequences for the region and beyond. NAM therefore once again draws the Security Council's attention to those serious matters, which threaten international peace and security. We call for actions to halt all Israeli incitement and provocations, as well as for respect for the sanctity of religious sites and the rights and access of Muslim and Christian worshippers, including Palestinians, in the city.

NAM must also reiterate its grave concern about the continuation of the illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, which continues to inflict severe humanitarian hardship on the Palestinian people. NAM condemns that collective punishment of the Palestinian people and urges the international community to persist with its calls on Israel, the occupying Power, to end the blockade and all illegal actions against the Palestinian people under its occupation and to respect its obligations under international law. If Israel persists in its contempt for the law, the international community must act forthwith to uphold the law and ensure accountability.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for the realization of their legitimate national aspirations and inalienable rights, including to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). NAM reaffirms the role of the international community, foremost the Security Council, in responsibly acting to promote the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace that will bring about a complete end to the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian and other occupied Arab lands occupied in 1967, and usher in a new era of peace and stability in the Middle East, a role that is starkly highlighted in this period of yet another impasse in the peace negotiations.

Lebanon has suffered from consecutive Israeli attacks against its territory, with a heavy human and material toll, followed by subsequent years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel still continues to violate Lebanese air space and to intensify its incursions over Lebanon. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). The provisions of that resolution should be implemented in a manner that guarantees the consolidation of the foundations of stability and security in Lebanon and prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement condemns all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, which have intensified after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. The Non-Aligned Movement demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In this debate, the representative of the Israeli regime made some unsubstantiated and fictional allegations against my country. I would like to provide a brief reaction in my national capacity.

First, I categorically reject those allegations, such vain efforts by him, which are not even cognizant of what this debate in the Security Council is all about. It does nothing but put the blame on others in order to divert international attention from its own apartheid policies, mockery of democracy, atrocities, acts of brutality, violations and acts of aggression against Palestinians and other peoples in the region, as well as its violations against the territorial integrity of other States in the region, in particular its recent cases of aggression against Lebanon and Syria.

It is indeed ironic that a regime famous for its repeated violations of internationally recognized borders and for attacking or threatening to use force against its neighbours and other countries — acts that have been well documented by the United Nations as war crimes and crimes against humanity — and, moreover, a regime with a dark record of developing, producing and stockpiling different kinds of inhuman weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, should accuse others of threatening peace and security.

I would like to reiterate the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran, namely, to see peace and justice prevail in the Middle East, which requires full respect for international norms and regulations by all, without discrimination.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, for your leadership and for your work as President of the Council. I would also like to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Guatemala firmly believes that diplomacy and dialogue are the best path to achieve a long-term solution to all the conflicts that persist in the Middle East, even though each situation has distinct characteristics that prevent the use of one-size-fits-all formulas. With that in mind, I will briefly touch upon two of the conflicts that in our view are of particular importance — the one in Syria and the Middle East peace process, including the Palestinian question.

With respect to the conflict in Syria, Guatemala continues to believe that the first step in any dialogue must be the cessation of violence. Such a premise is certainly beyond dispute in Syria. For more than three years, that conflict has destroyed an entire people, the value of human life, respect for human rights and even the cultural heritage of that great country. Armed struggle is simply not an option. We have viewed with horror the constant news of human rights abuses that have been committed in Syria. We cannot but add our voice to the calls for all violations and crimes to be investigated and brought to justice in due course.

Similarly, we are concerned by the call for presidential elections that have been announced for 3 June. Given the current context of violence and conflict in Syria, the concept of holding elections is irrational. Indeed, without claiming to judge the legal framework under which the elections have been called, we believe that the present circumstances make it impossible to convene a democratic process in which all citizens can freely vote and be elected or express their free will without fear of reprisals.

For that reason, we believe that conversations between the parties must resume. The efforts to achieve agreement on partial ceasefires are a first step that can be replicated in other areas. It is also imperative for there to be compliance with the resolutions already adopted by the Security Council and, where relevant, for the necessary measures to be implemented by all parties.

With respect to the Middle East peace process, recent developments are not encouraging. We commend the efforts of the United States Secretary of State to keep alive the hope of a two-State solution. In that regard, we hope that it will still be possible to reach an agreement to extend the deadline for negotiations.

We have watched with great alarm Israel's refusal to continue to comply with the agreement reached at the beginning of the negotiations, as well as the actions

to which that has led on the part of the Palestinian State. The refusal to undertake formal negotiations, the insistence on not modifying traditional positions and, in general, the tendency to take unilateral decisions that undermine all possibility of progress, suggest little interest and will in reaching a two-State solution with both sides living in peace within secure borders.

We believe that the recent agreement signed between Fatah and Hamas putting an end to the divisions that have separated them for seven years could have a positive effect, so long as they maintain the premise of an eventual unity Government that will continue to respect the two-State solution as the basis of all negotiations. Palestinian reconciliation has the potential to lead to an environment of peace and reconciliation in Palestine, so that any peace agreement will yield its hoped for fruit.

We are aware of the enormous challenges that this process presents for both sides, both nationally and internationally. We therefore hope that they find a way to work positively in order to comply with existing agreements and commitments. At the same time, the parties should make a serious commitment to advance on all the issues that would constitute a possible final agreement. We believe that the involvement of the international community, in particular that of the Quartet and regional actors, is indispensable throughout the process. We urge both sides to refrain from any and all acts that could endanger the discussions currently underway.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Naanda (Namibia): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important debate, which affords the broader United Nations membership an opportunity to contribute to the important deliberations on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also wish to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Palestinian people continue to suffer from injustice and oppression and are denied freedom and peace in the land of their birth, which remains under occupation by Israel. Namibia is increasingly concerned about reports that the situation in the Palestine territories continues to deteriorate, and that Israel continues to undermine the possibility of a two-State solution through its actions in East Jerusalem, which include pushing Arabs out of the city, maintaining the separation wall and the imposition of a restrictive building-permit regime. Israeli policies in Jerusalem not only affect its Palestinian population but pose a severe threat to the possibility of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict by political means. Namibia wishes to remind the Security Council that it is the collective responsibility of the entire global community to consider practical steps to address Israel's actions, particularly in East Jerusalem, since those actions constitute a sophisticated type of ethnic cleansing and another form of apartheid.

We condemn any attacks against civilians in Gaza and call on all parties to adhere to the terms of the Gaza ceasefire agreement. We also call on Israel to unconditionally lift the unjust blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, since it deprives Palestinians of the most rudimentary requirements of a decent livelihood. We further call on Israel to withdraw from all occupied Palestinian territories, cease its settlement activities and allow the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to perform its humanitarian activities unhindered. We also call on Israel to comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We are deeply concerned about the statement by the Israeli Prime Minister in which he calls for suspension of the peace talks because of the reconciliation agreement reached between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Hamas. The international community and the bodies of the United Nations should continue to play their crucial third-party role in dissuading Israel from taking unauthorized measures and in facilitating and fostering a climate of dialogue aimed at reaching a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, including resolving the future status of Jerusalem. The humanitarian situation of Palestinians in the city must also be addressed. A very urgent key factor for peace in the region is that Jerusalem should be put back on the political map.

I wish to join others in reaffirming Namibia's unwavering support for the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and independence, and I call on the Security Council to fulfil its mandate and take appropriate action to

end Israel's continuing occupation of Palestine. The international community has an obligation to ensure that the people of Palestine realize their inalienable right to self-determination and the creation of an independent, sovereign State of Palestine, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We must ensure that Palestine is unconditionally admitted as a full Member of the United Nations and its agencies and takes its rightful place in the global community of nations. We are pleased to note that the State of Palestine has acceded to 15 international conventions and that its signature is expected to enter into force on 2 May. In that regard, Namibia would like to call on the Security Council to resume its consideration of the State of Palestine's application for full membership in the United Nations and to make a positive recommendation on that to the General Assembly.

We remain convinced that our deliberations here today are fruitful and will contribute to the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution that can bring the Israeli occupation to an end and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights in an independent State of Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital. Real and lasting progress towards peace and freedom for Palestine can be achieved only through the implementation of all the relevant United Nations resolutions on the peaceful settlement of the question on Palestine.

In conclusion, 2014 has been proclaimed the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/12, adopted on 26 November 2013. That is a commendable milestone on the path to the momentum and political will needed to make an Israeli-Palestinian peace a reality. It therefore remains the responsibility of the United Nations and the international community to make sure that the question of Palestine is resolved in all its aspects.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Raja Zaib Shah (Malaysia): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. My delegation would also like to express its appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Malaysia associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Guinea on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

I would also like to thank Ambassador Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, for his statement this morning. Malaysia reaffirms its principled support for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine that recognizes the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to an independent State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Malaysia has remained committed to the implementation of such internationally recognized initiatives as the Arab Peace Initiative, the Oslo Accords, the Quartet road map, the Madrid terms of reference and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We are at a significant juncture in the Middle East peace process. The Palestinian people are joining hands in unity, and their leadership is intensifying its efforts to achieve independence. Israel, on the other hand, is sending dangerous signals that it is not ready for peace, and is escalating illegal and provocative actions on the ground. Despite the efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry to facilitate direct negotiations, what we have observed so far only demonstrates the asymmetry between the occupied and the occupier.

Malaysia remains steadfast in its desire to assist the Palestinian people in their efforts to establish a framework within which to administer a sovereign Palestinian State. In that connection, my delegation welcomes the Palestinian leadership's decision to accede to 15 international conventions. We reaffirm our longstanding commitment to supporting Palestine's continued efforts to obtain diplomatic and legal recognition in the United Nations and other international organizations. Malaysia has always supported a consolidated national unity between Fatah and Hamas, and we commend both sides on the reconciliation agreement achieved last week. However, my delegation regrets that this move was met by the Israeli side with a suspension of negotiations, as well as further economic sanctions on top of those it imposed when Palestine signed the international conventions.

We continue to be gravely concerned about the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory,

including East Jerusalem. Malaysia strongly condemns the Israeli security forces and extremist settlers' brazen desecration and illegal invasions of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which intensified in recent days following a debate by the Israeli Parliament on sovereignty over the holy site. The Security Council has made its views known on Jerusalem's status in numerous resolutions adopted between 1968 and 1980, specifically in resolutions 672 (1990) and 673 (1990), on Israel's violations of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Council should not remain silent while the occupying Power flagrantly violates those resolutions and ignores its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Those violations also include the deliberate extension of illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The situation in the Gaza Strip remains critical. My delegation is shocked that an Israeli air strike injured innocent civilians in Gaza shortly after the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation deal took place. It was just one example of Israel's escalation of military activities in recent weeks, as well as a manifestation of collective punishment. Civilians continued to be shot at and killed near border fences and in fishing boats, while trying to earn their livelihoods in a shattered economy. We remain deeply alarmed that the food and energy security needs of the population of Gaza are at severe levels. In that regard, Malaysia reiterates its demand for an immediate end to the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Malaysia reiterates its grave concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. All parties should comply with the provisions of resolution 2139 (2014) and allow for humanitarian aid to be provided to all of those in need. That also applies to the situation faced by Palestinian refugees in the camps of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) at Yarmouk. We welcome UNRWA's tireless efforts to provide for the distribution of food, particularly the resumption of the delivery of much-needed supplies after more than two weeks of being denied entry into the camp.

My delegation continues to support international efforts to call upon all parties in Syria to immediately end the crisis in a peaceful and meaningful manner through dialogue and negotiation, for the sake of the Syrian people and the region as a whole. In that regard, we support the efforts of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi and urge all parties to work together towards a political solution that is Syrian-led and inclusive. It is our hope that the parties concerned will be able to put aside their differences in order to ensure an outcome that will benefit the people of Syria.

Malaysia also reiterates its objections to Israel's actions in the occupied Syrian Golan, including the construction and expansion of illegal settlements in violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. In that regard, Malaysia calls for the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan in line with resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

My delegation welcomes the progress made by the new Government of Lebanon and recognizes the high priority it has placed on ensuring security and stability and protecting the national sovereignty of the country. At a time when the effects of the Syrian conflict continue to escalate and spill over into Lebanon, Malaysia urges all parties involved in the conflict to cease cross-border fire and other violence. In that regard, we reiterate that Israel must cease its violations of Lebanese sovereignty — whether by air, sea or land — and withdraw its troops from Lebanon, with full respect for the Blue Line, as set out in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Jónasson (Iceland): "The best thing is when you pass out, because then the pain stops." That is a quote from a University student in Hama contained in a report by the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the large scale practice of torture in Syria. No one should ever have to experience anything like that.

The violations committed in the conflict against the civilian population, including children, are horrific and incomprehensible. Nobody who commits such violations can expect to escape accountability. We continue to call on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

We strongly support the Geneva process and a political solution to the crisis in Syria. However, the Council must also exercise its leadership role in fostering a political and peaceful solution. The parties have demonstrated that they are not willing to lay down arms without international action, and the Council has yet to demonstrate that it is doing everything in its power to prevent further human tragedy. Considering

the serious consequences to regional peace and security, I ask the Council to please take action.

The Government of Syria, along with all other parties to the conflict, must strictly abide by international humanitarian and human rights law, including by affording immediate access to humanitarian assistance to ease the suffering of civilians. That is not a choice; it is an obligation. It is unacceptable that people are still starving — as the world has witnessed in Yarmouk.

We would like to use this opportunity to commend all who have been working under the extremely challenging circumstances in Syria to provide humanitarian assistance to the population, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

On the Palestinian question, the peace process has come to a standstill. We applaud Secretary of State Kerry for his direct involvement and dedication during the past few months and we sincerely hope that the parties will return to the negotiating table. We all know, however, that the process itself is not the aim. A process is only a means to an end, which is to reach an agreement on all final status issues that will, most importantly, lead to the end of the occupation and result in two States living side by side in peace and security. If negotiations do not resume soon, the Security Council will have to revert its attention to the conflict and become actively engaged in finding a peaceful settlement.

Although the peace process has come to a standstill, the same cannot be said about the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Settlement activities have accelerated since direct negotiations started last year. Also, Palestinian property rights continue to be violated by the near impossibility of acquiring building permits and by the restricting of access to their land. Settler violence also continues unabated.

With that in mind we call upon Israel, the occupying Power, to strictly comply with its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. That entails ceasing all settlement activities and preventing provocations around the holy sites in Jerusalem, with the understanding that all such provocations can have far-reaching consequences on peace and security in the region far beyond Israel and the State of Palestine.

Finally, we welcome the recent reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. It is hoped that will lead to a unified approach to a peaceful settlement with Israel. However, any unity Government that emerges from the deal should uphold the principle of non-violence, remain committed to achieving a two-State solution and a negotiated peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to accepting previous agreements and obligations, including Israel's legitimate right to exist. Furthermore, the reconciliation should lead to an improved situation on the ground. In that regard, we once more stress the importance of ending the indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza and of lifting the blockade against Gaza.

We also welcome the accession of the State of Palestine to the main human rights treaties for the benefit of the Palestinian population. This step can only strengthen the rule of law.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I welcome the initiative to convene this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the United Nations Peace Process in the Middle East, for his presence here today.

Since 1947, when Peru was a member of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, my country has consistently maintained a clear position on the question of Palestine, in accordance with the rules and principles of international law. Peru recognizes the need to implement General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which established the basis for the creation of two States on the territory of Palestine, one Arab and one Jewish, living side-by-side as neighbours within secure borders, in mutual recognition, in a climate of peace and security and free of threats or acts of force.

Consequently, and conscious of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to set up an independent State and in the belief that the establishment of a Palestinian State is a key element for the peaceful and definitive resolution of this conflict, Peru has recognized Palestine as a State and supported the resolutions adopted on this matter in the United Nations, including our co-sponsorship of the historic General Assembly resolution 67/19, which granted Palestine the status of a non-member Observer State of the Organization.

Based on those same principles, Peru voted in favour of Palestine's request to become a member State of UNESCO. The importance Peru attaches to this subject was shown by the recent official visit by President Humala Tasso to Israel and Palestine, which served to reassure both parties regarding Peru's historical position of support for the two-State solution and to reiterate our support for the Palestinian people.

In the same spirit, and consistent with respect for the two-State solution, Peru recognizes the undeniable right of the State of Israel to develop in peace and harmony with its neighbours, within secure borders and free of any threat to its people. Peru therefore firmly condemns all acts of aggression against Israel.

While we recognize Israel's right to preserve its own existence and security, it must be said that that right must be exercised with respect for human rights and within internationally defined and recognized borders. In that connection, my delegation reiterates that the acquisition of territory by force is inadmissible under international law, which is why any actions seeking to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration are null and void. We call on Israel to immediately cease the practice of settlement, house demolitions and evictions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, in accordance with the provisions of numerous resolutions of the General Assembly.

In keeping with our longstanding and consistent commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes, my delegation reaffirms its full support for and encourages efforts seeking lasting peace in the Middle East, which can be achieved only as a result of direct negotiations between the parties and on the basis of the full implementation by all parties of their obligations under the Madrid terms of reference, the Quartet road map and other agreements, as well as full respect for international law, including the relevant Security Council resolutions. In that regard, my delegation regrets the latest developments that led to the suspension of the direct negotiations under way with the support of Secretary of State John Kerry.

Peru believes that a united Palestine that recognizes the fundamental right of Israel to exist is an essential element for reaching a final political solution to this protracted conflict. My delegation therefore hopes that the parties will resume the dialogue in order to relaunch the peace process in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting and for your work at the helm of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his briefing this morning.

Today's date coincides with the deadline for the signing of a framework agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis. Despite the support and the good offices of the United States of America, Israel has not responded to international and Arab efforts. That State is therefore responsible for the failure of the negotiations as a result of a number of measures undertaken by it and the fact that it has shown no genuine desire to reach a solution. Those measurs include the attempts to undermine the integrity of Jerusalem, continued settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, the refusal to release Palestinian prisoners and other arbitrary, illegal and immoral activities.

The success of any agreement is precluded by Israel's intransigent position, which jeopardizes the very possibility of creating an independent and viable sovereign Palestinian State. I reiterate our concerns regarding the impact of continuing Israeli policies that regrettably undermine any hope for peace, including continued settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories and East Jerusalem under the threat or the use of force, the exploitation of water and natural resources belonging to Palestine, the arrest of Palestinians, the destruction of entire villages and the demolition of buildings, and the continued aggression against the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The State of Qatar has repeatedly stated its attachment to the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative to achieve a lasting and just peace in the region. Any agreement must be clearly based on recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people, including the end of the occupation and the creation of an independent Palestinian State on Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, a withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan, a recognition of the right of return of refugees and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Israel's continued blockade of the Gaza Strip, its prohibition on the building of a port or rebuilding the airport, and its refusal to allow Gaza to import building

materials to repair destruction for which Israel itself was responsible all create a situation of crisis. The blockade must therefore be lifted and border crossings reopened, pursuant to the agreement made in November 2005 by the various parties.

The State of Qatar has called for the end of the split between the two parts of Palestine and for the unification of all of Palestine and its children. We therefore welcome the national reconciliation, which we view as a significant step forward. We call on the international community to support the reconciliation process, which will enable us to achieve the peace we all want to see.

The proclamation of this year as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was both important and a logical precondition for achieving a solution based on lasting, just and sustainable peace. We would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the solidarity of Qatar with our Palestinian brothers in their rightful struggle. We urge the international community to do likewise.

The Syrian crisis is entering its fourth year. Its disastrous impacts have reached horrendous proportions. Syria has since the beginning of the crisis been the theatre of war crimes, grave violations of human rights, violations of international law and violations of international humanitarian law. A great deal of evidence clearly demonstrates that such crimes and violations have taken place, including crimes against humanity perpetrated in the regime's prisons and elsewhere. We therefore doubt that it will be possible to achieve the political solution that the international community is calling for.

The State of Qatar participated in the second Geneva Conference on Syria and has worked to convince the Syrian opposition to take part in that Conference, given the need for a political solution based on the Geneva communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/522, annex) of 30 June 2012, which was accepted by the Security Council as the basis for any political solution.

However, the failure by the regime to demonstrate its sincerity and its attempts to delay those negotiations clearly show that they do not want a political solution. The regime has gone even further and surprised the international community by undertaking measures aimed at scuttling the entire process. The Syrian regime has not limited itself to causing the exodus of millions of Syrians. It is also preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance and blocked the movement of humanitarian actors by flouting administrative processes. It has closed a number of medical and surgical centres and prevented non-governmental organizations from working with their partners on the ground, including blocking their movement.

All that is quite clear from the second report of the Secretary-General (S/2014/295) on the implementation of resolution 2139 (2014), with which we agree. The time for negotiations on humanitarian access is over. Resolution 2139 (2014) was adopted two months ago and has still not been implemented. The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. The security situation is doing likewise, as clearly shown by the report of the Secretary-General.

The continuing violence, systematic and large-scale killing and the use of heavy weaponry by the regime in urban areas, in particular the use of barrel bombs, is absolutely horrifying. We cannot remain silent in the face of the even more disturbing information that we have received regarding the use of toxic gases in populated areas. That is a very serious development, and we call for the setting up for a commission of inquiry on the issue. The international community's silence on that subject, in particular after the chemical weapons attacks in Ghouta, is simply unacceptable. In that respect, the Security Council must take swift and effective measures to deal with those blatant violations of the fundamental principles of international law and protect civilians in Syria. We must also be diligent and create a mechanism to bring to justice those who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I would first like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the able manner in which you are leading the work of the Council. I would also like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his comprehensive briefing.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People welcomes the tireless diplomatic efforts of the international community, in particular those led by the United States Administration over the past several months. The negotiations were the

best opportunity in recent years to find a negotiated solution.

As the deadline established nine months ago is now upon us, the Committee notes with concern the apparent lack of progress and the revising of expectations downwards. Once again, the talks have been compromised by the illegal settlement activities, which increased by 130 per cent, and non-compliance with the commitment to release prisoners who, under the Oslo agreements, should have been released a long time ago.

Support for the peace process was the main theme of the United Nations international meeting that the Committee held in Quito on 25 and 26 March. We continue to support the search for a comprehensive settlement on the basis of the agreed terms of reference, in particular the 1967 borders. The Committee calls upon the parties to honour their commitments, to show good will and cease all illegal activities and refrain from making new demands, which will only arouse distrust.

Last week, the Committee also held a round table with leading international law experts to discuss the implementation of various measures, in particular regarding the legal status of Palestinian prisoners, and solutions available to Palestine given its accession to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, The Hague conventions and other international treaties. The discussions we had on those issues will inform the work of the Committee and, hopefully, that of the Council. The Council will agree that settlement activity is a violation of international law and a violation of its decisions. The Committee therefore asks the Council, as the guarantor of international peace and security, to ensure respect for international law and its own resolutions. We ask the Council to urge the occupying Power to end its arbitrary detention and mistreatment of prisoners, release prisoners and provide medical care to detainees.

While continuing to support the peace process, the Committee appreciates the legitimate Palestinian initiatives aimed at promoting human rights and accountability, which are initiatives that unfortunately met with immediate threats of economic retaliation from the occupying Power and the most extensive confiscation of Palestinian lands in recent years.

However, the international community seems ambivalent with respect to the continuing illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. The resolution on the settlements just adopted by the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/25/L.37/Rev.1) is, from that point of view, a first step towards rectifying that imbalance. The international community should increasingly apply the relevant international standards in a uniform manner.

We are particularly concerned by the proliferation of provocative acts by extremists and certain Israeli political leaders in the vicinity of the holy sites in Jerusalem. Such measures restrict freedom of worship and further exacerbate tensions. The Israeli actions aimed at changing the legal status and the physical, demographic and cultural characteristics of occupied East Jerusalem, the future capital of the Palestinian State, are prohibited by international law. To shed light on the situation, the Committee, in cooperation with Turkey and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, will hold, in Ankara, on 12 and 13 May, an international meeting on the question of Jerusalem.

The Committee once again condemns attacks against civilians from either side and under any pretext whatsoever. We welcome the recent agreement on intra-Palestinian reconciliation and look forward to seeing it implemented in good faith by both parties.

Finally, I would like to say that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/12, the Committee is continuing its programme of activities for the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is in that context that a joint meeting was held on 9 and 10 March in the Egyptian capital between the League of Arab States and the Committee. It resulted in the reiteration, in the Cairo declaration, of the region's strong solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Fathalla, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations.

Mr. Fathalla (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Nigeria's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I also thank Mr. Serry for his briefing this morning.

Since its inception, the League of Arab States has played its role with respect to the question of Palestine, given that it is a cause crucial to the Arab nation. In that context, we have worked at creating a real vision of the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict. We have worked to try to find a just solution to the issue, and for almost 70 years the Arab League mechanisms have been based

on that objective. In that regard, I would like to recall the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the Beirut summit in 2002, which was welcomed by the international community as a true vision that could complement the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, which is, in fact, the guarantor of peace and security.

Based on our conviction as a regional organization of the importance of the Security Council, successive Arab summits have stressed the need to address and remain in contact with the Council, so that peace in the Arab region may be realized, through the complete withdrawal of the Arab territories occupied in 1967, in particular the occupied Syrian Golan and Lebanon, and through the respect by Israel, the Occupying Power, of international law, resolutions of the Security Council, resolutions that Israel has arrogantly ignored for years.

It is therefore necessary for the Security Council to address Israel's attempts to undermine the peace process through a two-pronged strategy. First, it agrees in principle to negotiations and begins them, but then imposes a status quo that subverts their purpose on the ground. The best example in that regard is the Israeli authorities' approval of a settlement project at the very moment when the negotiation under the auspices of the United States of America were beginning. Secondly, it seeks pretexts for stopping negotiations with the Palestinians. We see that in the Israeli reaction to the Palestinian reconciliation.

That reconciliation will lead to the unity of the Palestinians, of the people and the Government. It is an essential part of the peace process because it affirms the unity and the contiguity of the Palestinian territories between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It is one of the bases for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace that enjoys international support. It is also one of the bases for the establishment and construction of a Palestinian State on the territories occupied in 1967, in accordance with the principle of two States.

The success of the national reconciliation, which will lead to the formation of a national unity Government that will represent the Palestinian people, is the sole guarantee of achieving the unity and contiguity of the Palestinian territories. It is therefore necessary for the international community and the Security Council to welcome that as positive step, instead allowing Israel to use it as an excuse for stopping negotiations.

Developments over the last 60 years have shown that the peace process in the region will not be successful unless Israel makes a complete withdrawal from the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, in particular the Syrian Arab Golan and the south of Lebanon. In that regard, the Arab League reaffirms that Israel's position, which is in violation of international, Security Council resolutions and what peace requires, could force the Arab League to revisit the way the international community and its mechanisms deal with the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is now necessary to change methodologies and find new mechanisms for Arab action on the basis of international resolutions aimed at ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories.

The League of Arab States has many questions about the possibility of bringing about a comprehensive and just peace. With respect to the issue, the Arab League has made appeals in the past and continues today to make appeals at the ministerial level and at its summits for the world to recognize the serious nature of the Israeli violations of international humanitarian law on the ground and the way that the State of Israel deals with the issues of the settlements, prisoners, the separation wall and the unjust blockade imposed on Gaza, despite the numerous calls to the Security Council to live up to its mission.

The limited nature of the Security Council's response has very frequently disappointed us. Indeed, it caused us at our last summit, held in Kuwait on 25 and 26 March, to present numerous demands, inter alia, that the international community undertake efforts to bring an end to Israel's occupation actions in the Palestinian territories and the implementation of the relevant resolutions, in particular resolutions 465 (1980) and 497 (1981), which reaffirm the illegality of Israel's settlement policy and the necessity of dismantling the settlements as violations of international law.

Secondly, we appeal to the Security Council to adopt a resolution restricting and condemning Israel's expansionist projects and putting an end to the Israeli settlement policy.

Thirdly, we have reaffirmed the need for the international community to implement the advisory opinion of the International Criminal Court of 9 July 2004 (see A/ES-10/273) and General Assembly resolution ES-10/15, on the illegality of the racial separation wall, adopted on 20 July 2004, which called

upon the Secretary-General to establish a register of damages related to the construction of the wall.

Fourthly, we strongly condemn the Israeli declaration that the Al-Aqsa Mosque is an integral part of the territory of Israel, as well as the attempts by Israeli law to dismantle the Mosque by splitting it between Jews and Muslims. That is a serious escalation in its ongoing attacks against the sanctity of the Mosque and the holy sites of Islam and Christianity. UNESCO must live up to its responsibilities in that respect.

With regard to the Syrian Arab Golan, it is necessary to reaffirm that the continued occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan since 1967 is a constant threat to peace and security in the region and in the world. Secondly, t is also necessary to condemn Israel for its practices in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan based on illegal seizure of land and resources. It is also necessary to condemn the construction of settlements and other forms of expansion, as well as the exploitation of natural resources. We must call on the international community to respect international law in that sphere. Thirdly, we demand that the United Nations, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council require Israel to respect the Fourth Geneva Convention and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to protect the freedom of movement of the inhabitants of the Syrian Arab Golan so that they can visit their relatives in Syria. The international community must live up to its responsibilities in that respect.

With regard to the Syrian crisis in general, despite the appeals of the Arab League to the Security Council, in the light of the current situation and the impasse in negotiations in Geneva between the delegations of the opposition and the Syrian Government, the Kuwait summit welcomed the adoption of resolution 2139 (2014), on the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, and called for its implementation. We have also appealed for the adoption of a political solution, as stipulated by the declaration issued at the first Geneva Conference and the efforts of the Joint Special Representative.

In regard to the situation in Lebanon, the Arab Summit expressed solidarity with Lebanon and support for the political and economic efforts of the Government of Lebanon to guarantee the unity and stability of the country. In particular, we called for the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions so as to halt Israeli violations of Lebanese territory, airspace, maritime borders and civilian areas.

In conclusion, inasmuch as international relations are intensely intertwined and complex, we feel that the conflict in the Middle East is not limited to its regional dimension. It is a multifaceted conflict that is a threat to international peace and security and has deteriorated in various areas of the region. The situation speaks to the inability of the Security Council to assume its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. I would like to recall the first paragraph of the Charter of the United Nations, which calls for preserving future generations from the scourge of war.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mamabolo (South Africa): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Federal Republic of Nigeria on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month, and we welcome this open debate under its leadership. We also welcome the opportunity to participate and share our views in this important debate on the situation in the Middle East, with particular reference to the Middle East peace process.

I would also like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing to the Council today.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

On countless occasions, we have met in the Security Council Chamber to lament the fact that the deadlines set for the peace negotiations have not ushered positive ways forward with regard to the Middle East peace process. We regret that despite efforts of the United States over the past nine months, we see, instead of progress, regression with the talks frozen indefinitely. The stakes are high for both the Palestinians and the Israelis, and the suspension of the talks will not contribute to the achievement of a two-State solution, in which we all envision a State of Palestine, living side by side in security with Israel. South Africa is deeply concerned by the latest setbacks in the Middle East peace process.

In addition to the suspended talks, obstacles created by the illegal occupation of Palestine remain. South Africa reiterates its position that the solution envisioned by the Oslo Accords is being taken apart piecemeal with every new settlement that is announced. Not only are the settlements illegal under international law, but they also remain a major stumbling block to

the achievement of sustainable peace. Essentially, the Israeli settlement activities are confiscating Palestinian territory that is important for a future State, and at the same time they are aimed at isolating East Jerusalem from other main Palestinian cities.

South Africa welcomes the unity agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Hamas as a positive step. We have long argued that the division between the two main Palestinian parties has weakened Palestine's ability to negotiate a fair dispensation. More importantly, that unity will strengthen the Palestinian State and service delivery to its people through the establishment of a united Palestinian Government within weeks. We also welcome the announcement that elections will be held in Palestine in six months. In our view, a unified Palestinian voice will contribute significantly to the realization of a two-State solution.

We reiterate our call on the Security Council to fully exercise its functions under the Charter of the United Nations. With regard to the Palestinian question, we express our firm belief that the Council should provide sustained support to the peace process and work towards its full and satisfactory completion. We have yet another failure to achieve peace behind that. Perhaps the time has come for us to be much more creative in our endeavours to find a lasting and peaceful solution.

South Africa continues to believe in the right of the self-determination of the people of Palestine. We remain unshaken in our belief that the two-State solution, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State, remains the viable option for durable and lasting peace. The delicate process of negotiations between Israel and Palestine requires trust, and trust is earned by action, not by mere words.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the delegation of Nigeria for convening this important debate to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. The Kuwait delegation aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Group of Arab States.

The holding of periodic debates on this agenda item promotes international interests in the stability of the region and the Palestinian question, which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel, the occupying Power, continues to defy the resolutions of international legitimacy. The peoples and States of the region are therefore hopeful that the Security Council will shoulder its responsibilities and implement its own resolutions in that regard.

The Middle East peace process is at a delicate, unpredictable stage. Israel is fully responsible for the grave deadlock in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations because it refuses to commit to the terms of reference for the peace process, the two-State solution and the establishment of a Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It also refuses to release the fourth tranche of Palestinian prisoners. It pursues its policies of provocation and aggression, which weaken the peace process and set the stage for serious turmoil in the Middle East in which peace and security cannot prevail. The Arab and Palestinian peoples are fed up with Israel's defiance towards any real initiative to establish a just and lasting peace.

Among the most salient provocations are Israel's current policies against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in violation of its commitments under the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. The international community should pressure the occupying Power, Israel, to abandon its systematic extremist policies for the Judaization of Jerusalem because they are dangerous, threaten the stability of the region and intensify hatred, racism and extremism in the region. Such actions, which seek to change the demographic and legal character of Jerusalem, are illegal. We call upon the Council to take immediate action to protect Jerusalem and to hold Israel to its commitments as per the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Israel is also continuing its settlement policies and to confiscate Palestinian land, homes and farms. And it continues to hold Palestinians without trial in Israeli prisons. All such policies and practices of are not only a challenge to the international community and a breach of international humanitarian law but constitute a threat to any real chance for peace in the Middle East.

General Assembly resolution 68/12, which proclaims 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, serves to reiterate the support of the international community for the steadfast Palestinian people and their inalienable rights. It also expresses support for a peaceful, lasting and just settlement of the Palestinian question based on United

Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. In that regard, Kuwait supports the efforts of Palestine to accede to all the specialized agencies of the United Nations and all international treaties and protocols. We also support the resolutions adopted by the League of Arab States at its summit in Kuwait in March.

We call upon the international community to pressure Israel to end its illegal blockade of Gaza, to open all border crossings as per its international commitments, to end all illegal settlement activities and to commit to all Security Council resolutions, including those with respect to withdrawal from all lands occupied in 1967. Kuwait demands that Israel implement resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw from the Syrian Golan to the border of 4 June 1967. In addition, Kuwait is committed to supporting Lebanon and calls upon Israel to end its continued violation of Lebanese sovereignty and to withdraw from all Lebanese territory, in implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

To conclude, we welcome Palestinian national reconciliation in line with the Cairo declaration of 2011 and the Doha declaration of 2012. This is a positive step and we commend the Palestinian people and their leadership for their steadfast commitment to regain their rights. We will continue to support Palestine at all levels — political, financial and other — until there is an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and Palestine is established as an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

With regard to Syria, only a political solution can be reached. We call for the resumption of negotiations in implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). We furthermore call on the Security Council to follow up on implementation of resolution 2139 (2014) so that humanitarian assistance can be provided to the Syrian people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. I am also grateful to the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Robert Serry, for his comprehensive briefing.

Indonesia associates itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Guinea, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

The timing of today's meeting is of the essence, in view of the critical fact that the nine months of peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel were scheduled to be concluded at this time — in fact, today.

It is common knowledge that Indonesia is a steadfast supporter of the Palestinian people and their quest for peace through the realization of their dream of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In that regard, Indonesia is deeply distressed that, last week, the Government of Israel decided to call off the ongoing negotiations. It used as an excuse the historic agreement among Palestinians to form a Government of national unity.

Last year, the General Assembly designated 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, with the objective of boosting international support for the right of Palestinians to self-determination. In that light, it must be evident to the international community that Palestinian reconciliation is as much their inalienable right as that of self-determination.

Indonesia therefore takes this opportunity to congratulate the Palestinians upon reaching that historic agreement. We strongly believe that Palestinians' desire to unite is a right to be encouraged, since it guarantees that Palestinians can speak as one, and not with separate voices. In other words, the suggestion that Palestinians can enjoy a place at the negotiating table with Israel if they are divided is only a trick aimed at justifying Israel's unwillingness to continue negotiations.

For years, Indonesia has called on Israel to halt policies that frustrate the prospects of peace. Those policies, and not Palestinian unity, constitute the real problems and challenges for negotiations. Among those policies is the continued development of settlements. As was highlighted recently by the Israeli Bureau of Statistics, there was an astounding 123 per cent increase in settlement construction in the West Bank between 2012 and 2013.

Like many other countries, Indonesia has frequently asserted the illegality of settlement construction and the danger it poses to negotiations. We have also frequently drawn attention to the importance for Israel to demonstrate good faith in the negotiation of the other core issues, that is, the status of East Jerusalem,

permanent borders, security, refugees and water. To us and to other members of the international community, those are far more intractable issues than the choice of the Palestinians to set aside their divisions.

Let us remember that, for over 60 years, peace has eluded the Palestinian peoples due to the Israeli occupation. By deploying the tools of intimidation and fear, Israel has established the great insecurity that it now seeks to perpetuate by choosing to abandon negotiations.

We call on Israel to rethink that option and to return to the negotiating table, which is the only door to peace. We again call on Israel to withdraw without delay from the territories it has occupied since 1967 and to allow the realization of an independent State of Palestine as demanded by the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Finally, it is also our view that the international community must continue to assist Palestinians in the necessary preparation for their eventual statehood. In that regard, last month, Indonesia and Japan co-chaired the Second Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development. The East Asian nations and international organizations that took part in the Conference recommitted themselves to the development of Palestine, as well as to the ongoing Middle East peace process, through capacity-building and by reinvigorating the business environment in Palestine. We encourage other nations to undertake similar initiatives and urge those that are already undertaking such measures to step up their efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): Every now and then, we get the opportunity to assemble in the Security Council to revisit the long story of the suffering of the Palestinian people. That suffering is the result of a regime of oppression and systematic violations of human rights that are without precedent anywhere on Earth. The homes of ordinary Palestinians have been bulldozed, their land confiscated, trees and farms destroyed, settlements evicted, roads and neighbourhoods blocked and fragmented, and borders walled. That systematic policy of oppression has reduced the lives of Palestinians under occupation to subsistence level. Unfortunately, all of it is happening before the eyes of the international community, in the absence of any resolute action on its part.

The peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine has now been on the Security Council's agenda for more than six decades. During those long 66 years, even when its own resolutions were blatantly flouted, the Council often vacillated when it came to taking concrete action that could make a meaningful contribution to a fair solution to the issue. Due to the Council's inability to fulfil its responsibilities vis-à-vis the conflict, as mandated in the Charter of the United Nations, the long quest for a final agreement on the creation of an independent State of Palestine — on pre-1967 ceasefire lines in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, living peacefully side by side with the State of Israel — remains ever elusive.

It is now time for a bold new strategy for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The international community should set out a plan for a fair and long-term settlement of the Palestinian problem on the basis of the parameters outlined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. The United Nations cannot be a silent witness to the collective punishment imposed on the Palestinians by Israel, the occupying Power, and should play its due role in resolving this protracted crisis. The Security Council in particular must not evade its role, particularly since its own resolutions on the matter, adopted over time, remain unimplemented.

The role of the Security Council as the honest broker in a deal between Israel and Palestine is all the more important as the recent efforts to get the parties to negotiate a settlement themselves seem to be going nowhere. Nine months of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, facilitated by the United States, have just failed. This week, the Israeli security cabinet voted to end negotiations, citing Fatah's reconciliation with Hamas. But even before that, there were challenges. Israel baulked at the release of the final instalment of Palestinian prisoners, which was one of the Palestinians' basic demands for the talks .Despite American pleas, Israel also announced plans to expand settlements in the occupied territories and suspended the reimbursement of Palestinian tax money to the Authority.

Although the international community routinely restates its commitment to the concept of a two-State

solution, the construction of Israel's barrier in and around the West Bank and the expansion of settlements on occupied land make that solution less feasible. Meanwhile, Israeli settlement activities, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, Israeli military raids into Palestinian territories, and constant provocations to violence by extremist Israeli settlers continue to exacerbate tension and reinforce doubts about Israel's commitment to a two-State solution. The illegal settlement activities especially present an existential threat to the viability of a future Palestinian State. Even during the latest round of negotiations, 14,000 new settlement units were announced. If peace in the Middle East is to be achieved, the international community must prevail on Israel to cease further settlements, which are illegal under international law, and to dismantle the existing ones, in line with its obligations under article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It should also tear down the walls.

Israelis have suffered in the past and they know better than anyone that the aspirations of a nation cannot be denied forever. Even the mighty pharaohs could not prevent that, and neither could apartheid Rhodesia and South Africa. The creation of the State of Israel is proof of it. We therefore expect the Israeli leadership to reflect on its own history and facilitate a two-State solution. We are hopeful, because we have seen positive outcomes in recent times in places such as South Sudan and Timor-Leste. Those countries have achieved their sovereignty and independence with the aim of living in peace and harmony as equal members of the global community. Can Israel and Palestine follow the same path?

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has long been a major catalyst of instability and turmoil in the Middle East, fanning and fuelling violence and extremism in that region as well as the wider world. The Security Council has the responsibility under the Charter to secure peace and stability by addressing the root causes of this prolonged conflict and negotiating a just solution to it. We must invest the necessary political capital and resources in order to realize the inalienable and legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people for an independent, viable, contiguous State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and harmony. Achieving that goal would amend the historical injustice visited on the Palestinians and greatly contribute to lasting peace and stability in the Middle-East and around the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Silva (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers in commending you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate.

We align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The year 2014 has been a critical year for the Middle East peace process. It is important that the international community remain committed to finding a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East. We must not give up hope at this crucial juncture. We believe it is the responsibility of the parties concerned to create an environment conducive to peace. Improved conditions for Palestinians can only help to improving the situation in the region as a whole. The ongoing settlement activities, which are illegal under international law, must end as soon as possible if a sustainable solution in the region is to be found. The international community has repeatedly called for a freeze on settlement activity. We encourage the parties to exercise restraint for the sake of the greater goal of peace.

The blockade of the Gaza Strip is another obstacle to the peace process. Restrictions on imports and exports due to the blockade are stifling economic growth, and should be lifted in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009), an act that would contribute significantly to the economic advancement of Gaza and the well-being of its people. We note with concern that the United Nations has been hard pressed to keep the vast majority of the people of Gaza supplied with minimum necessities. We would like to emphasize our strong support for the work of United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The security needs of the people of Israel must also be respected. A climate conducive to peace will be encouraged by a approach of mutual sensitivity to each other's concerns. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians will only worsen feelings of suspicion and insecurity and widen the gap between the parties. Sri Lanka supports the implementation of the General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a

two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. Sri Lanka also supports the Palestinians' application for admission to full membership of the United Nations. We also recognize that the viability of the two-State solution will depend on the political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people.

We hope that every effort will be made to achieve success in the peace process so that both the Israeli and the Palestinian people will be able to enjoy peace and prosperity in their own lands. We should not let go of the chance, once again, to achieve a sustainable peace when there is much international goodwill supporting the process.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba fully supports the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Middle East continues to hold the attention of the international community. Time and again, the Council convenes such debates without any progress, while the major problems persist. The illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the main obstacle to achieving peace and a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

It is essential that the Council play its proper role in defending international peace and security and that it immediately adopt concrete, practical measures to ensure that Israel ends its aggression against the Palestinian people. There will be no peace in the Middle East so long as such aggression persists and the legitimate, inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are ignored. Israel's conduct in deliberate violation of United Nations resolutions, international law and international humanitarian law constitutes a threat to regional and international peace and security.

The General Assembly took a historic decision when its members, by majority decision, granted Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations. The international community must continue to support the Palestinian people's legitimate call for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The construction and expansion of the illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian territory; the difficult and painful reality of Palestinian prisoners; and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the besieged Gaza Strip, where the living conditions of the inhabitants have worsened as the unjust blockade has tightened, are unacceptable. Israel has announced plans to build more than 7,600 new settlements, together with the ongoing construction of thousands more throughout the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem and its surroundings, since negotiations resumed in 2013. Furthermore, Israel demolished at least 200 Palestinian homes in 2013, forcibly displaced hundreds of people, and continued the construction of the wall, isolating entire communities and hindering the establishment of the State of Palestine. Israeli forces continued their incursions into the occupied Palestinian territories, perpetuating the violent, destructive image of the occupation. In 2013, more than 4,000 Palestinians — including children — were arrested or detained, adding to the thousands of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Only an end to the settlement policy, the release of Palestinian prisoners, ensuring the right of return and the immediate, unconditional and complete lifting of the cruel and illegal blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip will lead to the launching of a genuine political process to peace in the region.

Cuba will continue to support the Palestinian people in their just struggle for self-determination, and welcomes the proclamation of 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We hope that it will mark a historic milestone in the Palestinian people's achievement of all of its rights, including the acceptance of the Palestinian State as a full Member of the United Nations. Cuba welcomes Palestine's application to accede to 15 international instruments. We demand an end to the occupation of all of the Arab territories and reiterate our position in favour of a just and lasting peace for all people of the Middle East region.

Cuba continues to attach attention to the situation in Syria and reiterates that a political solution, attained through dialogue and negotiation, is the only alternative to the conflict in that country. We oppose the calls of those who promote regime change in Syria and the use of force and violence. We cannot fail to reiterate our concern over the loss of innocent lives resulting from the Syrian conflict. We condemn all acts of violence against the civilian population in that country and

reject the supposed protection of human life as a pretext for foreign intervention. We also reject the complicity of the mainstream media, which distort reality while avoiding any consequences of their actions.

The Council's duty is to promote peace, not violence. It is to prevent destabilization, not to contribute to the financing, arming or training of any destabilizing actors. We emphasize the call to preserve the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and its people's right to self-determination without foreign interference or intervention of any kind.

We encourage the international community to continue assisting Syria in the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the fulfillment of the agreements on the destruction of its stockpile of chemical weapons under existing commitments. We also welcome the progress achieved in eliminating chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and the cooperation of the Syrian Government with the joint mission of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We also underscore the current efforts undertaken in complex conditions, to remove the chemical weapons from Syrian territory.

We reiterate that it is essential that those with influence on the opposition groups use it to promote the success of the mission, rather than hinder the process. Cuba regrets that the second round of talks on Syria ended without agreement among the parties. We share the yearning of the international community to pursue the dialogue and reach agreement on ending the conflict through a peaceful process led by the Syrian people.

Cuba reiterates its unequivocal condemnation of all acts, methods and practices of terrorism in all its aspects and manifestations, wherever and by whomsoever committed, including State terrorism. In that regard, Cuba condemns the acts of terrorism committed in the Middle East, including in Syria, as well as support for irregular armed groups, including mercenaries, which only contribute to destruction and death and hinder diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guinea.

Mr. Touré (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to underscore that I am speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in my capacity as its New York chair, in this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Today's meeting bears a special significance as it coincides with the end of the well-intentioned and much-appreciated efforts of the United States Secretary of State to move the Middle East peace process forward. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation believes that the renewed suspension of the peace talks and the indefensible status quo underscore the need to step up progress towards peace and stability in the region, which is undergoing rapid change. At this decisive moment, if the kind of credible political process to which the OIC remains fully committed is to continue successfully, certain conditions must be met. This means serious commitment on the part of the international community to bringing all illegal acts on the ground to an end, and to demanding respect for internationally agreed parametres, as defined by United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid terms of references and the Quartet road map; and for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and for the settlement of all core issues.

The OIC has repeatedly drawn the international community's attention to Israel's recent actions, especially its continuing settlement activities, which threaten to undermine the two-State solution and to exacerbate the situation on the ground. These actions constitute a grave breach of international law, seriously detract from the credibility of the peace efforts, undermine the contiguity and viability of the State of Palestine, and jeopardize the prospects for realizing the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. In this regard, the OIC stresses that the international community, in particular the Security Council, must ensure that its resolutions are respected and assume its full responsibility to address the illegal situation that Israel, the occupying Power, has created in an attempt to further entrench its occupation and further its de facto annexation of Palestinian land. The Council must take binding action to put an immediate end to Israel's construction of settlements in all of their manifestations, reverse all of Israel's attempts to distort reality, and eliminate the grave repercussions thereof on the Palestinian people, their land and resources.

The fragile situation on the ground resulting from Israel's fait-accompli policies are of profound and legitimate concern to the OIC. These illegitimate

and illegal policies seek to alter the historical, religious and demographic composition and character of the city of Jerusalem, isolating it from its natural environs, compromising the status of its holy sites and undermining the status of East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine through illegal and aggressive acts, including attempts to enact illegal laws to impose Israeli sovereignty over the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

In this regard, the OIC reaffirms that such acts may have extremely dangerous and far-reaching consequences that would not only jeopardize the progress and credibility of the peace process, but also destabilize the entire Middle East region. The OIC also condemns the recent escalation of acts of provocation and incitement by Israeli extremists, including settlers, Government officials and religious zealots, notably at Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The OIC therefore reaffirms the centrality of the Palestinian cause to its member States, stresses the Islamic, Arab and Palestinian identity of occupied East Jerusalem, and reiterates the need for full respect of the sanctity of its Islamic and Christian holy sites. Moreover, the OIC reiterates that East Jerusalem remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory that has been occupied by Israel since 1967, the illegal annexation of which by Israel remains unrecognized and condemned by the international community.

The OIC continues to monitor with great concern the plight of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and detention centres, which reflects the flagrant injustice and oppression to which the Palestinian people have been subject for decades. We express our deep concern over the hunger strikes carried out by detainees in protest of their abuse and captivity without charge or trial. In this regard, we underline the responsibility of the Security Council to ensure that Israel complies with the rules of international law and to protect the human rights of Palestinian prisoners.

The OIC welcomes the recent announcement on 23 April regarding Palestinian national reconciliation, which is a prerequisite for achieving Palestinian national aspirations and a just and lasting peace. The OIC wishes the Palestinian people the greatest of success in this important endeavour. The OIC also welcomes Palestine's recent accession to international humanitarian and human rights law treaties, stressing the critical importance of respect for international law, including for the attainment of a just and lasting peace.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to reaffirm the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people as they seek to reclaim their alienable national rights, including the rights to return and self-determination, and to establish an independent and sovereign State of Palestine on the land occupied by Israel since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as to reach a just solution to the question of Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). It is the hope of the OIC that 2014, as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, will see the occupation and oppression brought to an end and freedom and independence become a reality for the Palestinian people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, for the way you have led the work of the Council during the month of April. I also thank you for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I welcome the briefing by Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

Bolivia aligns itself with the statemenst made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Once again, the Security Council is meeting to discuss the situation in the Middle East, and unfortunately, there has been little progress in the implementation of the Council's international responsibilities. In this International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we welcome the fact that Palestine has signed 15 international treaties, most of which were related to human rights. It is a further sign of the will of the people and their Government to belong to the community gathered together in this Organization, on an equal footing, with equal rights and obligations. We must not forget, however, that Israel violated the agreement of 29 July 2013, under which it was to release 104 Palestinian prisoners who had been jailed for over 20 years. Today, 78 are free, but 26 others have not yet regained their freedom, although their release was scheduled to take place on 29 March.

In addition, on 1 April Israel announced plans for 700 new settlements in occupied Jerusalem.

Despite the situation, Bolivia welcomes the reconciliation process between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority that was successfully completed last week. We believe that it sends a powerful message of support for the efforts of President Mahmoud Abbas to achieve a sustainable and lasting peace and meet the demands and expectations of his people. The statement issued on Sunday by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Palestine lamenting the horrors of the Holocaust — which, in our view, was the worst crime of the twentieth century — is also of utmost importance because it provides fresh evidence that the denialism attributed to Palestinian authorities does not in fact exist. We regret, however, that Israel unilaterally suspended the talks — coincidentally, that same week. I therefore once again urge us to seek to prevent by all possible means the Palestinian people's falling victim to what may be one of the greatest tragedies of the twenty-first century.

Despite the high expectations raised by the peace process initiated on 29 July last year, reality has proven once again that agreements and commitments are not always honoured by their proponents. Since then, many Palestinians, including women and children, have been killed by Israeli attacks. In 2013 alone, 4,553 Palestinians, including children, were arrested and jailed, adding to the 5,000 already in prison; at least 200 homes were demolished, forcibly displacing thousands of people; and many more homes were built in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem — all in clear violation of international humanitarian law. The Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip continues to inflict suffering, poverty and inhumane conditions on Palestinian refugees.

We believe that Israel is not showing proof of good faith when it acts in such a manner and when, in the course of negotiations, it again and again postpones discussions on substantive issues affecting the Palestinian people, including the status of Palestine, the illegal Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem, access to water, borders, security and the situation of the Palestinian refugees.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia defends the cause of the Palestinian people, supports the exercise of their rights and unequivocally condemns Israel's crimes. Our position remains unchanged. In addition, we reiterate our support for the establishment of a Palestinian State, which Bolivia recognized as soon as it was announced, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with its capital in East Jerusalem. We reiterate Palestine's right to full status as a United Nations Member State, with all the rights and obligations that such a status entails, and we highlighted that on 15 November 2013, when our countries, Bolivia and Palestine, signed an agreement on diplomatic relations. In addition, we are proud to announce that we are a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

We believe that, once again, the Security Council has an important mission to help relaunch the peace talks and above all to find a just, lasting and inclusive agreement that will end the Israeli occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories. Failure to exert the utmost effort in that regard would only add to the stream of constant criticism that this important United Nations body has been subjected to in recent years.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this quarterly debate. I would like to congratulate Nigeria on its able leadership of the Council. I thank Mr. Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Bahrain continues to reiterate its position with respect to the Palestinian question, which is based on the need to implement the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, respect the terms of reference and work to find a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question. Such work can be successful only with the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the decisions of the Quartet. We continue to demand that the illegal blockade of Gaza be lifted.

We welcome the Palestinian national reconciliation agreement, signed in Gaza on Wednesday, 23 April, between Fatah and Hamas. We express our hope that the agreement will end the internal divisions and help the Palestinian people to attain their full rights, like any other people in the world. Most important among these is the right to achieve a lasting solution to the situation based on international legitimacy, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, and

the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also fully support the aspirations of the Palestinian people in all their efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region. We commend the historic achievement of and wisdom shown by the Palestinian leadership in ending years of intra-Palestinian division. We support the step taken by President Abbas in signing the accession documents to 15 international instruments and treaties. That is a step in the right direction and a legitimate right of the brotherly people of Palestine.

A peaceful settlement of the situation in the Middle East will be achieved only through an end to the occupation of Arab lands, including Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions; the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and the achievement of a just and lasting peace that guarantees the right of return to the Palestinians in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). In addition, we assert the need to implement the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council and to respect without condition the principles of international legitimacy, particularly with regard to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which prohibits any demographic change in territories under occupation.

The most important issue remains the continued suffering of the Palestinian people. We are in dire need of reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive solution that would guarantee the basic and legitimate rights of the Palestinian people like all other peoples. In that regard, it is important for all parties to honour their commitments to end the suffering of the Palestinian people, terminate the blockade of Gaza and halt the construction of settlements.

To conclude, King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa of Bahrain has affirmed that the Kingdom will continue to adhere to the principles of peace, freedom, justice, self-determination and coexistence, is committed to the implementation of the resolutions of international legitimacy, fervently champions the spirit of moderation, and supports the Palestinian people in attaining the fulfilment of their alienable rights.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Robert Serry to make a further comment.

Mr. Serry: I shall be very brief. Today has been a long and important debate, given its timing. We have all recognized the critical nature of the situation, and many have been appealing for prudent and restrained actions at this sensitive time. That is something that we have also been underscoring, if we are not going to lose sight of the two-State solution altogether. For my part, I will remain stubbornly committed to that shared objective.

Let me thank the Nigerian delegation for the smooth manner in which today's debate was conducted. I would like to thank all Council members and other speakers for having expressed appreciation for my work.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Israel, who has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Goren (Israel): Listening to some of the speakers today, I am reminded of Winston Churchill, who said, "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on". I will attempt to give truth a fighting chance in my short reply.

I would like to emphasize that the delegations that have praised the Abbas-Hamas unity agreement, which in its essence has forsaken the Quartet principles, have legitimized the path of terror over the path of peace. May I remind everyone that those principles are recognizing the State of Israel without prejudging what various grievances or claims are appropriate, abiding by previous diplomatic agreements, and renouncing violence as a means of achieving goals.

In recent months, we have a seen a well-orchestrated and dangerous political campaign on the issue of Jerusalem on the part of a number of Arab delegations, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The accusations made earlier today by those delegations are a continuation of those false charges and a distortion of the truth with no real basis in reality. Let me be clear. Israel will respect and grant full religious rights to people of all faiths, and Jerusalem is an open city to all religions. With Sunnis, Shiites and Alawites massacring each other, with Christians fleeing the region year after year, Israel remains an exception in a region that is embarrassingly intolerant.

It is truly absurd to hear some of the world's most oppressive regimes lecture the Middle East's only true democracy. For example, Saudi Arabia's policy towards women, gays and minorities is notorious throughout the

entire world. I do not think anyone in this Chamber can take seriously any criticism by the Saudi representative on the issues of human rights and intolerance.

The representative of Lebanon began her talk with a poetic but wrong description of life in Jerusalem. I would be happy to invite her for a visit to see the real Jerusalem in all its beauty and freedom, but I am worried that intolerance and bigotry in her own country would not allow it. Perhaps Lebanon should consider toning down its rhetoric and turning up the heat on the Hizbullah terrorist organization, which has amassed an arsenal of over 60,000 rockets in populated areas. That is tantamount to a double war crime.

Finally, it is unfortunate that a major State in our region, which is vying for a leadership role, has decided yet again to adopt an unconstructive approach and demonize the only democracy in the Middle East. It takes a great deal of audacity on the part of that country's representative to criticize Israel, given that sectarian tensions, violence, killings and religious intolerance in his country are on the rise. "Denial is not just the name of a river."

The President: There are no more speakers inscribed on my list.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.